

consumer  
electronics



ceLifestyles.com

# Lifestyles™

## Creative CE Projects



Our Favorite  
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**In**

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**Hearing**  
Loss



April 2006  
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graphire<sup>4</sup>

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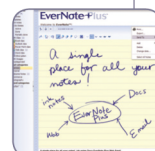
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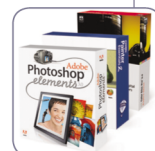
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# ceLifestyles™

## feature topic

### Creative CE Projects

Who wouldn't love stylish new prints for their living room walls? Or a keepsake DVD full of your parents reminiscing about their courtship days? These and other creative projects are both easy and fun to make with common CE products such as a digital camera, digital camcorder, PC, and printer. With our help, you can let your imagination run wild and create lasting mementos for your family and friends. Let's get started!

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#### On Our Cover:

Featured on our cover this month is the Creative Zen MicroPhoto (\$249.99; [www.creative.com](http://www.creative.com)).





## Open

There's always something new, interesting and stylish happening in the world of consumer electronics. That's why the Open section packs the latest news and trends into the first few pages of *CE Lifestyles*, along with the sparkle and bling that you can buy to accessorize your devices.

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## Editor's Note

It's not often that work inspires us to undertake a meaningful project in our personal lives, but that's what happened with me and this month's feature package.

As I was editing Theano Nikitas' article on page 38 called "Stretch Your Video Wings," I realized I might not know as much about my family as I should—or, more importantly, *could*. My grandparents are quite young, and they're vivacious and healthy. They're at a wonderful time in their lives—they have an entire lifetime full of distinct memories, but they're still able to make many more.

Theano's article spurred me into planning a project I've had hidden in the back of my mind for years: that is, to document my grandparents' lives by interviewing them on camera. But even though I work with CE devices every day, I didn't realize just how creative I could get with those interviews. I have a digital camcorder; I have several video-editing software programs on a robust PC, a scanner, a VHS/DVD combo, and a DVD-RW. With the interviews, my CE devices, and a little time and effort, I can make a literal documentary of my family's history, full of scanned photos and mementos, interviews, meaningful songs, even footage from their old 8mm camera. All on a DVD that anyone could watch at home. That is so much cooler than a plain old interview.

It will hopefully become a cherished keepsake for our entire family, as well as a very important archive for family members who might not be so lucky to know my grandparents at such a great time in their lives. I am really looking forward to this project, and I'll be sure to document it here in *CE Lifestyles*. What a great way for my work life and personal life to intersect, and what a wonderful result of professional inspiration. All because of a little creativity and technology know-how.

Live well, friends.

Katie Sommer  
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\*except iPod® shuffle. iPod not included.



# ce news

COMPILED BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

## Satellite Networks Add Family Friendly Programming Packages

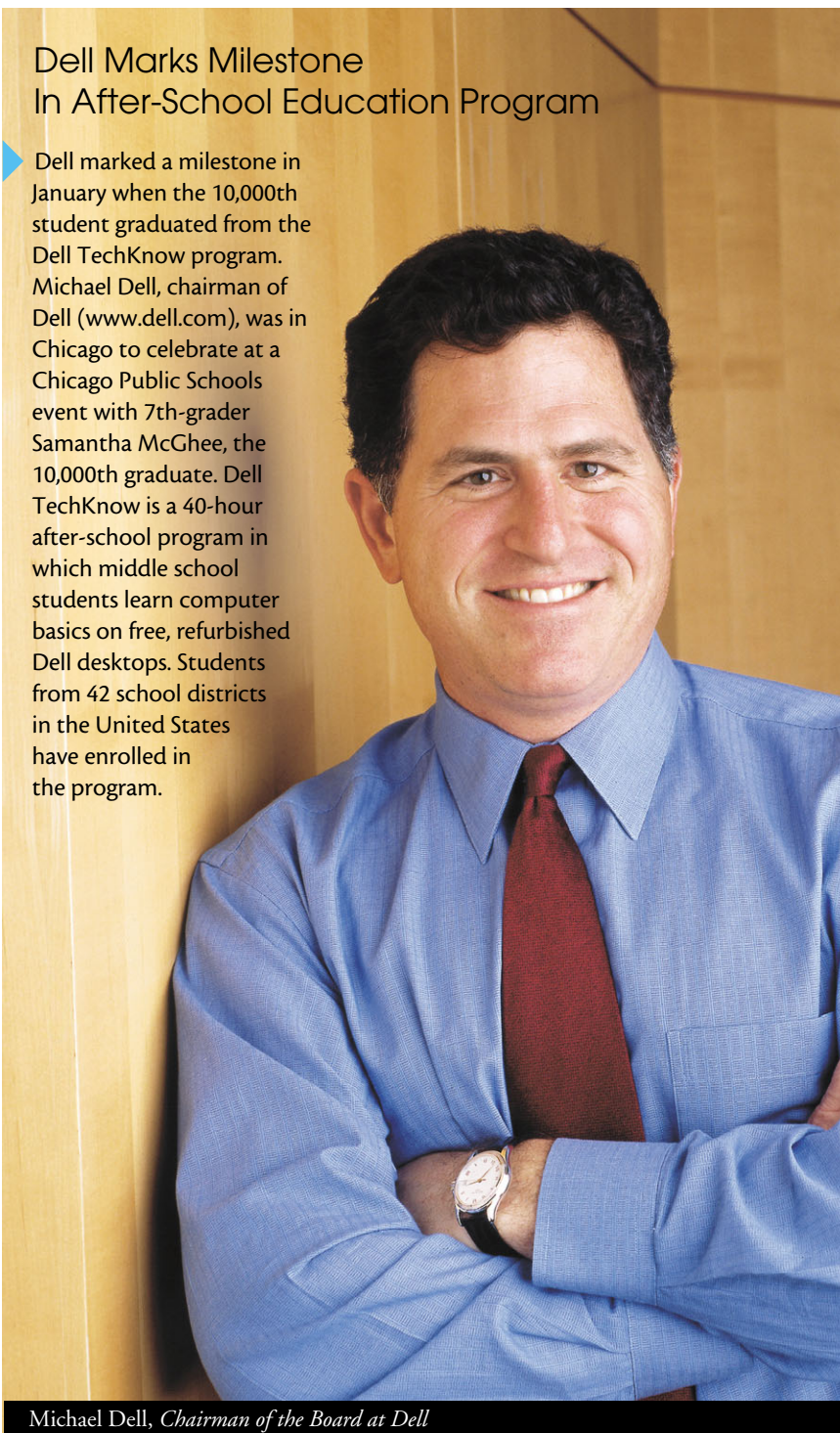
Two satellite TV services have added family-friendly programming packages. In February DISH Network ([www.dishnetwork.com](http://www.dishnetwork.com)) added the DishFAMILY tier. The 40-plus channels in this tier include Animal Planet, Food Network, TV Land, Discovery Kids, CNN Headline News, Nickelodeon East and West, and QVC. The package is priced at \$19.99 a month or \$24.99 per month with local broadcast TV channels.

Rival satellite provider DirecTV ([www.directv.com](http://www.directv.com)) is adding its own family package, Total Choice Family, sometime in April. For \$34.99 a month, viewers will receive their local broadcast channels and more than 40 other channels, including HGTV, Toon Disney, Noggin, Nickelodeon East and West, Boomerang, CNN Headline News, Hallmark Channel, HSN, QVC, and Food Network.

**dish**  
NETWORK  
**Better TV for all.**

## Dell Marks Milestone In After-School Education Program

Dell marked a milestone in January when the 10,000th student graduated from the Dell TechKnow program. Michael Dell, chairman of Dell ([www.dell.com](http://www.dell.com)), was in Chicago to celebrate at a Chicago Public Schools event with 7th-grader Samantha McGhee, the 10,000th graduate. Dell TechKnow is a 40-hour after-school program in which middle school students learn computer basics on free, refurbished Dell desktops. Students from 42 school districts in the United States have enrolled in the program.



Michael Dell, *Chairman of the Board at Dell*

PHOTO COURTESY OF DELL



## Almost Half Of Fraud Complaints Are Internet-Related

Charges of identity theft topped the list of consumer complaints of fraud lodged with the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) in 2005. Of the 686,683 complaints filed with the FTC either online or via a toll-free number, 37% reported alleged cases of identity theft. Of these, the most common type of reported ID theft was credit card fraud.

Of all the fraud complaints filed, 46% were Internet-related. Other categories of fraud complaint included Internet auctions (12%), foreign money offers (8%), and shop-at-home or catalog sales (8%).

## Konica Minolta Stops Production Of Cameras

Konica Minolta (konicaminolta.us) has stopped production of film and digital cameras as of March 31. Instead, the company announced it'll focus on manufacturing lens mount systems, based on its Maxxum/Dynax lens technology, for D-SLR (Digital-Single Lens Reflex) cameras that Sony plans to develop by this summer. Sony bought the SLR camera technology from Konica Minolta.



Beginning in April, Sony also will assume responsibility for customer service obligations on existing Konica Minolta cameras. In addition, Konica Minolta will stop making mini photo labs for retailers as of March 31, and it will end the production of color film and color photo paper by the close of the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

## Study Finds Cell-Phone Use Linked To Negative Perceptions Of Family Life

A study published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* finds a link between cell phone use and "negative spillover" between work and home life. The study found that people who consistently use a cell phone or pager are more likely to report such spillover, and those are the folks who say that they are less satisfied with their family life.

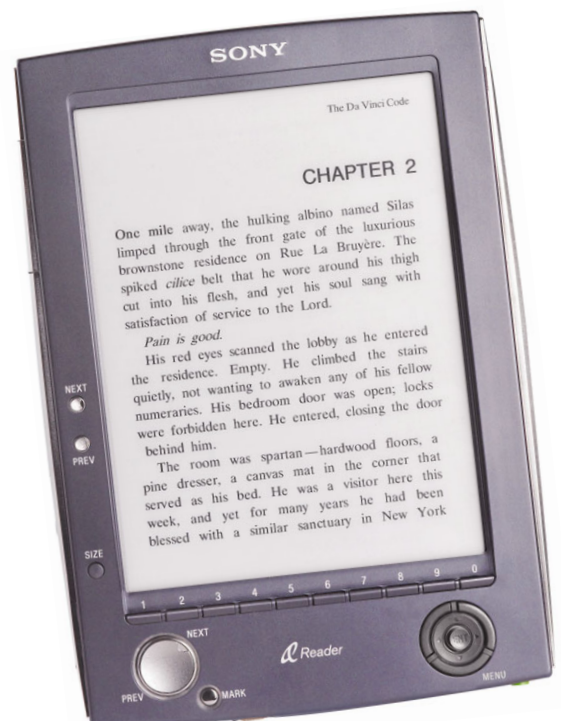
The blurring between work and home life can go both ways, the study found. For instance, work trespasses on home life when a parent takes a call from work at home, and home life spills over into the workplace when children call their parents at work about family matters. The study, conducted by Noelle Chesley, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, found that the two-way blurring between work and home life was more pronounced for women than for men.

## New Sony Reader Holds Hundreds Of Digital Books

A day at the beach doesn't mean you have to choose which book to take along to read. With the soon-to-be-released Sony Reader (price not set at press time; [www.sony.com/reader](http://www.sony.com/reader)), you can take about 80 ebooks with you and store them in the same space as one book when you use an optional SD (Secure Digital) card or Memory Stick.

In addition to releasing the Reader, Sony is adding digital books to its Connect Store ([musicstore.connect.com](http://musicstore.connect.com)). Besides music, you'll be able to download digital books from publishers such as HarperCollins, Penguin-Putnam, Random House, and Simon & Schuster, as well as smaller publishers. Avid readers also can download the Connect Reader and install it on their PC or notebook, where they can store and categorize the digital books they've bought.

The compact Reader weighs less than 9 ounces, has a 6-inch display, and is only 1/2-inch thick. Besides digital books, the Reader can store and display Adobe PDF documents, content from blogs and news feeds, and JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group) photos. The rechargeable batteries have enough power between charges for about 7,500 page turns.





## 2005 Was A Blockbuster Year For Some CE Products

Consumers spent \$76.9 billion on CE and IT products in 2005, an 8% increase over the \$71.2 billion they spent in 2004.

"Prices came down, and aggressive advertising increased," says Stephen Baker, vice president of industry analysis for The NPD Group. "It was the one-two punch needed to get consumers in the stores."

LCD TVs, which grew in sales by 160% even as the average selling price for those models dropped below \$1,000, are but one of the must-have items consumers bought.

Below are selected CE categories and how they fared in the marketplace in 2005.

Product Category	Increase In Unit Sales From 2004 To 2005 (Percent Of Increase)
LCD TVs	160%
MP3 players	159%
Plasma TVs	128%
Notebooks	45%
Digital cameras	21%
Desktop PCs	5%

## Nokia Leads Vendors In Shipments Of Mobile Phones



Worldwide shipments of mobile phones in 2005 passed 825.4 million units, an increase of 16.7% from the 707.3 million phones shipped in 2004. Nokia (www.nokia.com) led all manufacturers with 264.9 million phones shipped, though Motorola (www.motorola.com) saw the biggest year-to-year increase (39.7%).

### Top Mobile Phone Vendors Worldwide

Vendor	2005 Shipments (in millions)	Market Share	Year-To-Year Increase
Nokia	264.9	32.1%	27.6%
Motorola	145.9	17.7%	39.7%
Samsung	102.9	12.5%	19.0%
LG Electronics	55.0	6.7%	23.8%
Sony Ericsson	51.2	6.2%	20.4%
Others	205.6	24.9%	-7.3%

## tidbits

In Feb., 2006, **One Year** after releasing its 8 Series LCD TV displays, Samsung sold its 1 millionth unit.

Source: HWH Public Relations

Only 25% of consumers who own an MP3 player buy music online.

Source: Forrester Research

Cameraphones will capture almost 40% of all digital images taken worldwide by 2009.

Source: IDC

50% of consumers who own HDTVs don't subscribe to HD programming.

Source: Forrester Research

IBM received more U.S. patents in **2005** than any other private sector companies in the world, followed by Canon and HP.

Source: U.S. Patent and Trademark Office





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### Creative Zen Vision:M

\$329.99 • [www.creative.com](http://www.creative.com)

The latest Zen music player was the darling of this year's Consumer Electronics Show, and for good reason. Its built-in FM radio and recorder, support for a variety of video formats, and compatibility with at least half a dozen download sites make it the most feature-rich player out there.



### Garmin nüvi 350

\$969.22 • [www.garmin.com](http://www.garmin.com)

The nüvi isn't *just* a compact navigation system for any vehicle or hiking trip; after you've arrived, it's also a music player, photo viewer, and travel companion (with world clock, currency converter, and calculator). Add in optional Travel Guide or Language Guide software, and the nüvi might be all you need for this year's amusement park tour.

## Palm Treo 700W

\$619 • [www.palm.com](http://www.palm.com)

The long-awaited Windows Mobile version of Palm's ubiquitous smartphone is finally here. If you're a hard charging, mobile-computing professional who hasn't taken the Treo plunge, now may be the time. The 700W offers wireless Internet and email, music and video playback, a portable Office productivity suite, and full phone functionality, as well.



## JVC Everio GZ-MG37

\$800 • [www.jvc.com](http://www.jvc.com)

Need to capture this spring's hottest soccer matches, without constantly swapping out tapes and discs? JVC's latest digital camcorder has enough built-in storage to capture 10 hours of DVD-quality video and 14 hours of TV-quality footage. Upload the video to a PC afterward or burn directly to a DVD recorder. And worry about juggling juice boxes instead.



## Apple iPod Radio Remote

\$49 • [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)

Are you tired of all those gigabytes of the same music? Do you miss listening to the radio? Apple's latest accessory for the nano and the video iPod plugs into the Dock Connector and lets you tune into FM stations using the Click Wheel and screen.





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## Accessories With Style

Hey, April.

COMPILED BY SEAN DOOLITTLE



**Louis Vuitton iPod Cover**  
\$240 • [www.louisvuitton.com](http://www.louisvuitton.com)

Here's just the accessory for Easter: the new Louis Vuitton iPod cover. Designed for LV by Takashi Murakami, featuring spring candy colors on white leather, you can wear this case on a shoulder strap or attach it to a belt. Fits full-sized iPods.

### **Large Faux-Croc TechStyle Portfolio** \$59.99 • [www.mobileedge.org](http://www.mobileedge.org)

Here, we have the latest offering from Mobile Edge, one of our go-to depots for professional, functional tech bags with style. This semirigid, croc-print case fits widescreen notebooks up to 16 x 11 x 1.7 inches (HxWxD). The interior features a sleeve for file folders and a removable mesh pouch for cables. Available in black or pink.



### **Ambient Orb** \$149.99 • [www.ambientdevices.com](http://www.ambientdevices.com)



Get the advance word on April showers with ambient light. We first glimpsed one of these in the office of super agent Ari Gold on the HBO original series "Entourage," and we decided to put our investigative-journalism skills to work. Behold the Ambient Orb: sculpted glass décor that connects wirelessly to Ambient's national information network. The orb changes shades based on the weather forecast, the movement of the Dow Jones Industrial average, or even the spring pollen count, depending on your configuration. Perfect for rainmakers.



### **Asono Mica MP3 Player** \$154 (varies according to conversion rates) [www.asono.com](http://www.asono.com)

We saw this MP3 player last spring, but we still like it. Created for Asono by the Scandinavian design group Norway Says, the Mica integrates headphones and player into a single sleek pendant-style affair, available in black, red, and white. The Mica features 512MB of digital storage (and there's a 1GB version for approximately \$199), adjustable equalizer settings, FM radio, and voice recording, all at the tip of your thumb via the integrated joystick controller. It supports MP3, WMA (Windows Media Audio), and ASF (Advanced System Format) file types and is available directly through the Asono Online Shop.





## Meet our expert Julie

Home A/V Editor, Crutchfield

*"Just about every day, I come across a cool product which strikes me as perfect for someone I know. These are some of my current favorites."*

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## Expert picks

### THE RIGHT FLAT-PANEL FOR YOU?

**Sony Bravia™ XBR® TVs**

– 26", 32" and 40" screen sizes

"Sony's XBR LCD TVs may be the most gorgeous High-Definition flat-panels I've ever seen. Unlike early LCD TVs, their color is natural and the response time is great. But you don't lose the accuracy and sharpness that LCD is known for. Best of all, they all have a PC input as well as the usual video inputs. Plug in your laptop, and you have an impressive display for work or gaming."

Sony Bravia XBR LCD TVs #158KD26XBR, 158KD32XBR, 158KD40XBR



### iPOD'S PERFECT PAL

**Bose® SoundDock™**

"These days, I find I don't have to spend much time telling people about the Apple iPod – most of them already know. But I've noticed more and more iPod fans who are looking for ways to listen to their iPod without headphones. One of the solutions I've been suggesting is the attractive-yet-understated Bose SoundDock. It's essentially a dock with built-in powered speakers. All you do is slide your iPod into place and let the music play."

Bose SoundDock #018SNDDOCK



### POCKET-SIZE, YET POWERFUL

**Canon PowerShot SD450**

"Canon's Digital ELPH line of cameras has always been sleek, but in the last year they've started packing an amazing amount of technology into each tiny camera body. For example, the best-selling SD450 is a 5-megapixel camera with a 2½" viewscreen, but it weighs just 5 ounces and is under an inch deep."

Canon PowerShot SD450 #280PSSD450

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Shopping Site Of The Month

# Payless ShoeSource

[www.payless.com](http://www.payless.com)



# W

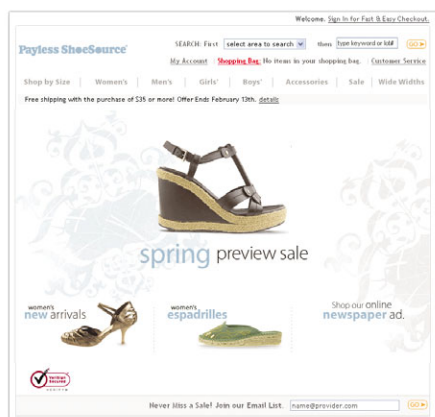
hat is it about shoes that makes so many women weak in the knees? Although we're not sure we'll ever be able to answer that question with any certainty, we do know where you can feed your desire to expand your shoe collection. At Payless ShoeSource's Web site ([www.payless.com](http://www.payless.com)), you can search for shoes confidently in whatever way suits you. In fact, Payless.com has been recognized by research and consulting firm Customer Respect Group as a site that treats its customers well. In an October 2005 study, Payless.com ranked No. 1 out of 53 retail sites. Other sites included in the study that made the top 10 were CVS, L.L. Bean, and Barnes & Noble.

## If The Shoe Fits


If you're the type of shopper who takes the "I'll know it when I see it" approach, you'll appreciate the ease with which you can navigate your way through the site and view multiple pictures of the shoes that catch your eye. Click the See It Spin! link below the main picture on any pair of shoe's page to see a nearly 360° view of the item. The site uses IBM's HotMedia technology, which creates the animation using Java without the need for a plug-in.

In order to be sure that you see only shoes that are available in your size, use the Shop By Size link at the top of the page. Select the appropriate radio button (Women's, Men's, Girls', or Boys') and click the circle that corresponds to the size you need. You will be directed to a page that looks like the main search page. However, your search results within each category will display only shoes that are available in the size you

selected. If you are unsure of your size, click the Feet Measurement Tips link to the right of the size options and click a shoe sizer (for women, men, or kids) under the How To Measure heading. A PDF file will open with a printable chart and instructions on how to use it properly. (If you don't already have Adobe Reader, which you will need to view the PDF file, on your computer, you can download it at [www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html](http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html).)



One thing that makes Payless.com unique is the option to have your order shipped to a local Payless ShoeSource—free. If you're in a hurry for your new shoes, however, this is not the way to go. In-store delivery takes 14 to 17 days after shipping, which means you may be waiting for several weeks. But, it is a free service. So, if you don't want to pay the extra shipping and handling charges and are patient enough to wait, free in-store delivery is a great option. After you place your order (select this shipment option while checking out), you'll receive three email updates, with the last one notifying you when your shoes have arrived. And with stores in all 50 states, chances are, you aren't too far from a location.

When it comes down to it, no matter how you prefer to shop, Payless.com can help you narrow your search for your next pair of shoes. How you define "narrow" is up to you, however. 

BY JOY MARTIN



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*Each month, Vince Cogley and Trista Kunce, both staff members at Sandhills Publishing, share their thoughts about a device or two of their choice. They may not reach common ground on living room décor, but they both agree that CE helps them live well, just sometimes in different ways.*

# His . . .

**T**rista will never let me live this down, but I have to grudgingly concede she might—*might*—have been right about something a few months ago. Shortly after I heralded hard drive-based digital music players as superior to tinier, flash-based players, Apple dropped its nano on the world. I'm now a proud nano owner and haven't regretted the decision yet. Unfortunately for my checking account, Steve Jobs shrewdly produced a product that clamors for accessories as much as Paris Hilton on her birthday. I've snagged DLO's Action Jacket (\$29.99; [www.dlo.com](http://www.dlo.com)) and have Harmon Kardon's Drive + Play (\$199.99; [www.harmonkardon.com](http://www.harmonkardon.com)) and Klipsch's iGroove (\$279.99; [www.klipsch.com](http://www.klipsch.com)) on my list of must-haves, which is going to be, like, so expensive.


A pair of headphones that would even please a pampered hotel heiress will eventually make its way to my wish list, so I gladly considered giving Logitech's Wireless Headphones for MP3 (\$129.99; [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)) a try.

Perhaps it's a simple matter of unfortunate juxtaposition, but attaching a wireless transmitter to my nano's headphone jack that's more than half as big as the nano itself struck me as a little counterintuitive. Not only that, but the headphones themselves were also heavy and unadjustable. After using earbuds for the last few months, it took me a while to shake the feeling I had a pair of thick plastic earmuffs strapped to my head. And that's *not* hot.

I compared Logitech headphones to the standard Apple earbud headphones included with my nano. The deep bass in Kanye West's "Jesus Walks" resonated more and sounded fuller on the Wireless Headphones for MP3 than on my earbuds. Similarly, the Logitech headphones drew out more of the instrumental complexity of John Vanderslice's "Trance Manual" than I knew existed. I was pleasantly surprised with the sound quality.

Pairing Logitech's headphones with my nano for a morning jog was a blessing and a curse: I appreciated not worrying about a long dangling cord, but I had to use the small extension cord included with the headphones because the transmitter didn't sit flush with my nano when it was in the Action Jacket. To keep the transmitter from flopping around, I had to restrain it with my armband.

Despite my jogging maladies, I really enjoyed the Wireless Headphones for MP3 around the house. I set my nano across the room when I replaced a ceiling fan, so I didn't have to worry about damaging my iPod or snagging its earbud cords. And being the progressive-minded guy that I am, I didn't mind rinsing dishes from the evening's chicken cordon bleu because my nano had no chance to accidentally meet its watery demise.

So yet again, I find myself in the uncomfortable position of having to agree with my His & Hers coed. The Wireless Headphones for MP3 are useful in some instances, but not as useful as you might think. 

BY VINCE COGLEY



# & Hers CE

Most gadgets are wireless these days, and for good reason: Wires seem to snag on everything and often keep you confined to a certain area. So, if I use a wireless computer, Internet, and phone, why shouldn't a gadget I use more often than most of those devices be wireless, too?


It's a good question, and I'm not sure why the multiple pairs of headphones I use are wired. This month, though, I was able to un-wire my ears with Logitech's Wireless Headphones for MP3.

These wireless headphones were convenient for me during several activities, including exercising at the gym, cleaning the house, and toiling away at work, but I wasn't sure I could part with my old headphones, despite their constricting wires.

Wearing the wireless headphones at the gym was terrific because I didn't have to worry about headphone wires catching on the machines while I exercised. Also, although the headphones only let you roam up to 30 feet away from your audio device, that wasn't a problem in my tiny gym. I could put my MP3 player in a cubby hole next to my keys and move wherever I wanted. But not everyone exercises at a small gym and can leave his or her MP3 player sitting alone for anyone to pocket.

Using the wireless headphones at home and work, however, was the most liberating. I'm typically not enthusiastic about cleaning the house, but some good tunes always get me motivated. To listen to music, I have to crank up my stereo in the basement (scaring the dog and cat) or deal with the wired earbuds I use with my MP3 player that always seem to get caught on something when I bend down. (You can imagine how much I bend down while cleaning if you have kids, pets, or a messy husband; cleaning always begins with picking up all the toys off the floor.) With wireless headphones I was free from slobbery dog toys tangled up in headphone wires and unconcerned about wires getting wet when cleaning the bathtub.

At work I could whip around in my chair and get up without headphone wires yanking me backward. I could also enjoy my tunes on the way to the printer or on a trip to the back of the office to chat with Vince. However, these aren't the most inconspicuous or attractive headphones, so walking around the office with them on probably wouldn't be one of the things I would consider doing ever again.

Ultimately, parting with my wired headphones wasn't a bad experience. Logitech's Wireless Headphones for MP3 freed me to do things more easily because I didn't get tangled up in wires. But, unable to wander more than 30 feet and only able to adjust the volume but unable to change the audio tracks on the headphones, I still felt a bit wired. 

BY TRISTA KUNCE

Logitech Wireless Headphones for MP3

\$129.99

[www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)





# Fab Four

With so many great new products hitting the market this spring, it was tough to choose just four to single out as “fabulous.” Manufacturers are finally starting to “get it” when it comes to designing products that appeal to both the sense and sensibility of female consumers, and technology is rapidly bringing us better cameras, more multifunction phones, and MP3 players that make the first generation look just a hair less retro than an 8-track.

For this issue, we turned our Fab Four spotlight on MP3 player royalty, a mobile phone that succeeds at being a jack-of-all-trades, a prince among paupers in the realm of home audio systems, and an impressive new D-SLR camera that is sure to be the belle of the ball.

## digital camera



## digital camera

**Why:** With the introduction of its first D-SLR, Samsung has produced a most impressive digicam. This 6MP beauty places equal emphasis on form and function—which, of course, we love.

The GX-1S provides a bright, high-magnification **pentaprism** (a five-sided prism, which is standard on all D-SLR cameras) viewfinder with a 2.5-inch LCD monitor that you can view from almost any angle. The compact camera weighs just enough to feel solid without being burdensome (17.8 ounces minus the battery).

This full-featured, user-friendly camera is a good choice if you're leaping from point-and-shoot to D-SLR. An in-camera guidance system explains shooting, flash modes, and white balance settings. And, due to a partnership with Pentax, current Pentax camera and lens owners can switch to this camera without buying new lenses.

**Bottom Line:** An impressive, high-performance, user-friendly D-SLR.

## mp3 player



## mp3 player

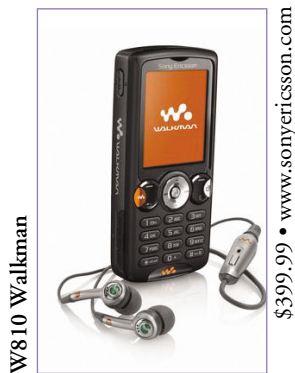
**Why:** Despite fabulous competitors from all over the portable digital audio player map, iPod is still the gold standard. The new iPod (announced last October) added video to the impressive menu of functions already available. Not only can the new video iPod do all the things its most recent predecessor could—play music, store and display photos, tune in to podcasts—it is also thinner and lighter and can last up to five hours longer.

The 60GB model holds roughly 15,000 songs, 25,000 photos, and 150 hours of video. We recently downloaded an episode of “Desperate Housewives” and watched it while waiting for a sick friend at the hospital. The 2.5-inch color display is surprisingly crisp—and having video on the go made an otherwise painful wait breeze by.

**Bottom Line:** The video iPod remains the standard in its field.

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

## phone



\$399.99 • [www.sonyericsson.com](http://www.sonyericsson.com)

phone

**Why:** Sony Ericsson's newest Walkman phone represents the next-gen in mobile phones. This quad-band EDGE (Enhanced Data for GSM Evolution) phone has a built-in music player and 2MP camera, as well as Bluetooth, and a 512MB removable Memory Stick PRO Duo that can hold roughly 150 audio tracks (or 15 full-length CDs).

The W810 Walkman Phone comes in just one color—black with orange trim—but its engineers paid attention to the tastes of female consumers when designing it. They also focused on usability: A dedicated Walkman button pulls up the music menu; common music controls are located below the display, so users can adjust volume or switch tracks without digging into menus; music automatically pauses when a call comes in and resumes when the call ends; and you can switch to a music-only mode to disable the phone function (in hospitals or on planes.)

**Bottom Line:** Convergence meets convenience in a sleek, stylish music phone.

## wild card



\$199.99 • [www.rokulabs.com](http://www.rokulabs.com)

wild card

**Why:** If you're hooked on Internet radio or have thousands of digital audio files on your hard drive, the Roku SoundBridge Network Music Player is a liberating way to access either. You can listen from anywhere in your home (depending on your network's range) without turning on PCs or setting up more complicated (or pricey) home music systems.

The SoundBridge M1000 connects to any stereo system or powered set of speakers and uses iTunes or Windows Media Connect (among others) as a music server, so there's no extra software to install, and existing playlists are immediately available. It supports Rhapsody, Napster, MSN Music, Musicmatch, and all other PlaysForSure music services and is compatible with both Mac and Windows.

The lightweight aluminum cylinder has a small base mount and a remote control.

**Bottom Line:** A stylish and affordable answer to home-audio needs.

The Camera:  
Samsung GX-1S

\$TBA\*

[www.samsungcamerausa.com](http://www.samsungcamerausa.com)

\*price not available at press time

## The MP3 Player:

## Apple iPod

\$299 (30GB)

\$399 (60GB)

[www.apple.com/ipod](http://www.apple.com/ipod)

## The Phone

## W810 Walkman

\$399.99

[www.sonyericsson.com](http://www.sonyericsson.com)

## The Wild Card:

## Roku SoundBridge

\$199.99

[www.rokulabs.com](http://www.rokulabs.com)





## The On-The-Go Professional

**The Service:** Napster To Go  
([www.napster.com](http://www.napster.com))



**What It Is:** This service targets listeners who spend just as much time in an airport or hotel as they do in the office. Although iPod owners are out of luck, Napster To Go supports dozens of digital music players from Creative, Dell, iriver, and more. Napster To Go's monthly subscription fee lets you download as little or as much as you want, whether you want 10 songs or 10 albums, but there's a catch: You don't actually own the music you download. Once you cancel your subscription, you can no longer play the songs. (However, you can purchase tracks individually for 99 cents through Napster Light.)

**The Cost:** \$14.99 (monthly)

**Crank It Up:** Help yourself to as many songs as you want because a subscription with Napster To Go gives you access to an unlimited number of downloads. As long as you continue subscribing, you'll be able to add as many songs as your digital music player can hold. The service also supports several Palm PDAs (personal digital assistants), such as the LifeDrive and several Treo models.

**Turn Off That Noise:** It's nice to brag to friends that you just downloaded your 10,000th song of the month and paid as much as your friend who bought 15 songs from a service that charges a per song download fee, but you're locked into paying the subscription fee to hang on to the music you downloaded. You can't burn the songs to a CD, and the new 1GB iPod shuffle you received for Valentine's Day is useless with the subscription.

**Y**ou always considered yourself the Sufjan Stevens superfan. Not only do you own all of his albums, but you also go to his concerts. But much to your chagrin, you hear a Sufjan tune you haven't heard before as you crane your head around your cubicle and listen to your officemate's PC. As his voice leads you on a musical adventure, you wonder how this song slipped under your radar.

As it turns out, many artists have exclusive tracks on iTunes ([www.apple.com/itunes](http://www.apple.com/itunes)), Apple's digital multimedia download service. Although iTunes is one of the most well-known methods for acquiring and listening to music over the Internet, it's certainly not the perfect choice for every listener. If you have an insatiable appetite for music but find that the albums you buy frequently end up collecting dust in a CD tower after a couple of spins, buying songs at 99 cents a pop could become a burden on a credit card. On the other hand, if actually owning the music you download is essential, iTunes makes buying music online almost as effortless as walking through a checkout lane.

Whether you're a Sufjan Stevens fanatic, a garage band enthusiast with a knack for picking out the next big name, or simply someone who enjoys a diverse collection of Top 40 hits, there's a service ready to deliver that music the way you want. We've picked our top choice for five types of listeners.

BY VINCE COGLEY

## The High-End Stereo Owner

**The Service:** MusicGiants Network  
(www.musicgiants.com)



**What It Is:** The MusicGiants Network offers its songs in high fidelity, which means you can listen to music without conceding to decreased quality associated with compressing songs into formats such as MP3 or AAC. The primary reason songs are compressed into these formats is to save space. The bit rate for most compressed files is 128Kbps (kilobits per second) to 192Kbps; MusicGiants' songs are encoded as lossless, or uncompressed, WMAs (Windows Media Audio) with a bit rate between 470Kbps and 1,100Kbps. As a result, the strings of a Mozart concerto sing with uncompromising quality.

**The Cost:** \$1.29 per song  
(complete album costs vary)

**Crank It Up:** This service is for someone who wants high-quality audio and is willing to pay for it. Measly earbud headphones will not adequately convey differences in quality between a song encoded with a 128Kbps bit rate and one with a 1,100Kbps bit rate, but premium speakers will tell a different story. The songs are a bit more expensive than those from other services, but you pay for CD-quality sound. You wouldn't serve Miles Raymond Yellow Tail Merlot; MusicGiants Network is a bottle of '61 Cheval Blanc for your stereo.

**Turn Off That Noise:** If you want a music service for your portable digital music player, MusicGiants is not for you. Most players simply aren't large enough to hold an appreciable amount of music. Indie music aficionados will also be disappointed. At press time, MusicGiants had only negotiated contracts with the four major labels—EMI, Warner Music Group, Universal, and Sony/BMG.

## The College Student

**The Service:** Yahoo! Music Unlimited  
(music.yahoo.com)



**What It Is:** Buying music on a college budget can be as difficult as devising new ways to cook Ramen noodles. Yahoo! Music Unlimited is, in principle, the same type of service as Napster To Go. You pay a monthly fee in exchange for access to Yahoo! Music Unlimited's collection of songs. The combination of Yahoo! Music Unlimited and Yahoo!'s free Music Engine lets you download as many songs as you want, but when you cancel your subscription, you lose the songs you download.

**The Cost:** \$6.99 monthly;  
\$59.98 annually

**Crank It Up:** Buying an annual subscription is significantly cheaper than using similar services such as Napster (not Napster To Go) or Rhapsody (www.rhapsody.com). Even though you don't technically own the songs you download with Yahoo! Music Unlimited, subscribers can buy individual songs for 79 cents, instead of 99 cents, the regular cost. Once you buy the songs, you can burn them to CDs.

**Turn Off That Noise:** Again, Yahoo! Music Unlimited subscribers are really renting the music they listen to. This isn't the service for you if you want to retain the songs you buy. Songs you download with Yahoo! Music Unlimited will play on your PC, but you won't be able to transfer them to a portable device. Paying for an annual subscription lowers the cost further, but it locks you into a year-long commitment.



## The Family Of Music Fans

**The Service:** iTunes Music Store  
([www.apple.com/itunes](http://www.apple.com/itunes))



### iTunes

**What It Is:** Until a suitable challenger emerges, iTunes is *the* online music store. You can download singles or albums, and Apple has recently grown iTunes Music Store to include music videos and episodes of many TV shows.

**The Cost:** 99 cents per song  
(complete album costs vary);  
\$1.99 per video

**Crank It Up:** There are reasons the iTunes Music Store is so popular: It's easy to use and has a huge selection of music. If you can do without jewel cases and liner notes, albums are generally cheaper on iTunes than in a brick-and-mortar store. Missing an episode of *Lost* is no longer a crisis because you can download commercial-free episodes. There's something for everyone: Everyone from teenyboppers to Deadheads should find songs to please their ears. Podcasts are essentially downloadable radio broadcasts, and you can download those from iTunes, as well.

**Turn Off That Noise:** Although the iTunes Music Store is the obvious choice for iPod owners, it can be a disadvantage if you own a different MP3 player. When you purchase a song on iTunes, you are downloading an audio file **encoded** (the process of converting data from one form to another) using an **AAC** (Advanced Audio Coding) format. What that means is that iTunes songs are compatible with iTunes software and iPods. Your Creative Zen Micro won't welcome songs you buy through Apple's store.

## The Wannabe DJ

**The Service:** Pandora  
([www.pandora.com](http://www.pandora.com))

### PANDORA

**What It Is:** To understand Pandora, you must understand what drives it—the Music Genome Project. An undertaking that's been six years in the making, the Music Genome Project's 30 musician-analysts have listened to thousands of songs, breaking them down according to attributes such as harmony, instrumentation, and lyrics. When you set up an account with Pandora, you create stations according to a band or song you like. Pandora will usually (but not always) at least play a song from the band you choose. If you like it, Pandora will play songs that feature the same musical attributes.

**The Cost:** Free (ad supported);  
\$12 (quarterly for no ads);  
\$36 (annually for no ads)

**Crank It Up:** The goal is to discover new bands you might have never known existed. You can create up to 100 of these stations. It's the perfect place for you if you love finding new music that's similar to songs you already love. Pandora shares similarities with satellite radio services such as XM Radio ([www.xmradio.com](http://www.xmradio.com)). Aspiring rockers even have the opportunity to submit their own tracks to the Music Genome Project for review. Toiling away in your garage night after night may finally pay off.

**Turn Off That Noise:** Pandora's still growing, so it doesn't have the depth of some of the other services. Classical and Latin music are currently noticeably absent from Pandora. You can't buy the music you hear (but it does link to iTunes to buy individual songs or Amazon.com to buy albums) or download songs to an MP3 player.



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# One MP3 Player; Many Uses

Get More Mileage Out Of This Versatile Gadget



iPod nano (2GB) • \$199.99 • [www.ipod.com](http://www.ipod.com)

Listening to music underwent a fundamental change four years ago, when Apple's iPod took center stage, transforming digital personal music players from curiosities to must-have gadgets.

MP3 players excel at playing music, but they're capable of so much

more. Don't let yours languish on a shelf just because you're not in the mood to listen to music. If you don't yet own an MP3 player, the ideas below may provide just the excuse you need to fit one into your budget.

## Don't Just Play, Record

We usually think of MP3 players as, well, players, but many of them can also make live recordings. Some models,

such as the iriver T10 (\$199.99 for 1GB; \$149.99 for 512MB; [www.iriver.com](http://www.iriver.com)), can record from a built-in microphone, as well as from a built-in FM tuner.

Take your MP3 player with you the next time you want to record something, such as a meeting or a classroom lecture. Another fun use of a player's recording capabilities is to gather a group of friends and create your own material for a **podcast** (an audio file that you place on a Web site; any updates you make to the podcast are automatically available to anyone who subscribes to it). Try improvising a radio show or event, with each person assuming one or more roles.

## Temporarily Store Photos

There's nothing worse than taking a digital camera on vacation, only to discover that you've filled your only available memory card. Normally, this would mean either erasing some photos to make room for new ones or springing for an additional memory card or two.

A better, and less expensive, option is to use your MP3 player as a repository for your photos. You can use the USB port available on many MP3 players to connect them to the camera and transfer the photos. (Some MP3 players also require a special adapter.) If your camera is set to take JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group) images, your MP3 player may even be able to display them. If you have one of the larger hard drive-based players, such as the iPod 60GB (\$399;

www.ipod.com), which can hold up to 15,000 images, then you can shoot as many photos as you like, without worrying about running out of room or making tough decisions about which ones to keep. Even the diminutive iPod nano, with its 4GB capacity (\$249), can hold up to 1,000 photos.

## Rock Your World

You can connect most players to powered speakers, the same way you can connect your PC to speakers. There are a multitude of speaker add-ons available for MP3 players. Many speakers, such as the Logitech mm50 (\$149.99; [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)), also provide a docking and charging station for the player. Other speaker/dock stations, such as the iriver U10 Cradle (\$69), designed for the iriver U10, also offer remote capabilities, so you can control the volume or song selection from across the room.

You might also try hooking up your home or car stereo to the headphone connector on the player. If you have a dock, it may have a set of audio outputs you can use for even better sound fidelity.

## Wakeup Call

One of the most overlooked features of many MP3 players is the alarm function, which you can set to play music or an audible alarm. In order for a player such as the iriver T10 to be useful as a wake-up alarm, you'll need to connect it to a set of speakers. There are many portable speaker sets designed specifically for traveling with an MP3 player. Some, such as the Logitech mm22 (\$59.99) and mm28 (\$79.99), produce clear, clean sound, even though they fold up compactly for travel.

## Sneakernet, The Next Gen

At its heart, an MP3 player is a file storage system that can interface with a computer. In most cases, when you connect



iriver T10 (1GB) • \$199.99 • [www.iriver.com](http://www.iriver.com)

the player to a PC, the player shows up as another drive. This native file system capability means you have a handy way to move files from one computer to another, without using a network. Want to tweak that PowerPoint presentation you've been working so hard on all week? Copy the file to your MP3 player and take it home. Copying files to an MP3 player is faster than burning them to CD or DVD, plus you won't waste media on something you may not need for long. In addition, some hard drive-based players offer much greater storage capacities than CDs (650MB) or DVDs (4 to 17GB).

## Slideshows


In addition to using your MP3 player to store your favorite photos, you can also use it to share the photos when you visit family and friends. Plug the MP3 player into an available computer, and everyone can enjoy (or at least view) your photos.

You can take this one step further if your player can display images on its own screen. Most photo-capable players can create slideshows with fancy

transitions and background music. You can play the slideshow on the player's small screen or on an available computer. Players that offer video output, such as the 20GB ARCHOS Gmini 402 Pocket Media Center (\$249.95; [www.archos.com](http://www.archos.com)) and the iPod video (\$299 for 30GB, \$399 for 60GB), can connect to a television screen, so a large group can gather round and share the experience.

## Books On Pods

Many MP3 players can play a variety of audio book formats, as well as podcasts. Enough material is available in both formats to satisfy almost everyone.

Audio books are available in abridged and unabridged formats and can help you keep on top of the latest business trends, listen to classic books or your favorite TV show, or catch up on the news from Lake Wobegon. The best part is that you can do this almost anywhere, whether relaxing at home, enduring the daily commute, or traveling on business. 

BY TOM NELSON AND MARY O'CONNOR



# Enjoy Music But Be Careful

Keep Your Ears Safe



6i Isolator Earphones • \$149 • [www.etymotic.com](http://www.etymotic.com)

It should come as no surprise that listening to loud noises for too long can harm your hearing, but many people ignore this when it comes to their music. Who doesn't love rocking out to Franz Ferdinand or singing along to Abba? And portable music players, because they pour sound directly into the ear canal without dispersing it around the room first, can be especially dangerous if played at too high volume levels for too long. But with a little common sense and the right products, you can keep your hearing and enjoy your music, too.

## Precautions

The first rule of prevention is awareness, and knowing what's too loud will greatly help when your finger strays toward the volume button. Medical experts set 85db (decibels) as the threshold above which permanent hearing loss can occur. At 90db, damage can occur with eight hours of continuous exposure. In two hours, 100db (less than most players' maximum volume) can create hearing loss. A vacuum cleaner operates at about 85db; use that comparison as a general guide. If your music is louder than a vacuum cleaner, it's too loud for extended listening. View our "How Loud Is It?" sidebar for more information on safe listening times and decibel levels.

Almost all portable music players exceed safe volume levels at their maximum settings. Apple's iPods (\$99 to \$399; [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)) can reach 102db, a level that causes hearing loss after just one hour. Never spend time with your music cranked all the way up. Set your volume to the lowest level at which you can enjoy your music, and try to avoid the upper reaches of the volume setting. Remember that daily noise exposure is cumulative. If you're regularly exposed to loud noises (above 85db) each day, you have to be more careful and limit your exposure to loud music more diligently.

### Safe Bets For Your Ears

Safe listening is about more than decibels and duration, though. Perceived volume is crucial to setting appropriate volume levels—the lower you can set the volume while hearing your music clearly, the safer you'll be. There are several factors affecting perceived volume, and choosing the right audio products can make a big difference.

First, high-quality audio players and components, such as Cowon's iAUDIO-X5 (20GB is \$329, 30GB is \$379; [www.cowonamerica.com](http://www.cowonamerica.com)), provide clearer audio at lower volumes. Quality matters, and not just because high-quality audio is more enjoyable—it's safer too. So before you skimp on a cheap, "muddy"-sounding player, think about how loud you'll have to listen to it.

In general, low-quality earbuds are the worst type of earphones you can use. Unfortunately, they're also inexpensive and come with most players. But they often distort audio and fail to block outside noise, forcing you to listen at louder volumes than you otherwise would. High-quality over-the-ear cups



Active Noise Cancellation Headphones  
\$199.95 • [www.solitudeheadsets.com](http://www.solitudeheadsets.com)

are the best models for affordable stationary listening.

**Block outside noise.** Noise-canceling and noise-isolation earphones can also help protect your ears. That's because both

of these types drown out ambient noise and let you hear your music at a lower volume level. Both also come in smaller ear bud-style models, making them the best choice if you travel often or work out. Noise-cancellation technology counteracts external sounds with **pink noise**, which is a frequency that cancels out common environmental sounds. Noise-canceling headphones aren't perfect, and you should try them out before buying because some people experience discomfort when listening to them. But high-quality products such as (the Solitude Active Noise Cancellation Headphones) \$199.95; [www.solitudeheadsets.com](http://www.solitudeheadsets.com)) will ensure better and safer listening.

Isolation headphones reduce ambient noise by fitting snugly inside the ear canal and creating a seal to block out other sounds.

For many people, isolation works as well as noise canceling, and they don't have the unpleasant side effects. Etymotic's 6i Isolator Earphones (\$149; [www.etymotic.com](http://www.etymotic.com)) produce crisp, clear sounds you can comfortably hear at safe

## How Loud Is It?

**J**ust how loud does your music have to be to cause hearing loss? For comparison, an iPod at maximum volume can exceed 102db, which is louder than a motorcycle and can cause permanent damage in less than 60 minutes. Here are some other helpful comparisons you can keep in mind when trying to judge the decibel level of your music.

<u>Device</u>	<u>Decibel Level</u>	<u>Maximum Safe Time</u>
Vacuum Cleaner	85db	12 hours
Lawnmower	90db	8 hours
Motorcycle	95db	4 hours
Snowmobile	100db	2 hours
Chainsaw	105db	1 hour
Rock Concert	110db	30 minutes



## Target Volumes

**M** P3 players all have different volume levels: What a 5 is on your iPod may be a 7 on your husband's Creative Zen Nano. How can you make sure they're all at the safest volume? First, keep the volume to no louder than the sound of a vacuum cleaner. Estimate conservatively—we all tend to underestimate the volume of pleasant sounds and overestimate the volume of unpleasant ones. ASHA (the American Speech-Language Hearing Association; [www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org)) approximates the quarter-volume level of most players at 85db—the threshold for safe long-term listening. Other experts promote a “60/30” rule: Following the rule, you'd set your player's volume below 60% of the maximum level and take breaks every 30 minutes. Whatever rule you use, avoid the upper end of the volume setting and give your ears a break every once in awhile. ●


volume levels, and they also fit inside your ear canal so you won't have bulky cups over your ears.

## Listen To This

When discussing safe listening products, it's worth noting that several European countries have limited the decibel volumes digital music players can reach. For the most part, the limit is 100db, which can still cause hearing loss after just two hours. Apple and several other manufacturers have created versions of their players specifically for the European market. Export restrictions sometimes apply, but if you can find an online site selling European versions (or if you have a friend abroad), you might be able to hunt down one of these self-limiting products.

Anyone who has listened to digital music is probably familiar with the problem of songs encoded at different volumes and different bit rates; this leads to one song blasting after a particularly mellow one. If you can standardize the volume of your tracks and avoid constantly adjusting the volume level, you'll be able to protect your hearing better. To that end, try to download all your music from the same service and at the same quality levels. When ripping your own music, encode the audio files at a consistent volume and bit rate. If your collection of audio files is inconsistent in quality, volume-leveling software (such as MP3Gain; [freemp3gain.sourceforge.net](http://freemp3gain.sourceforge.net)) can equalize your files and help get rid of those nasty surprises when the track changes.

If you're really serious about volume control, invest in a decibel meter (available from electronics specialty retailers), which will tell you just how loud any player is at any given volume setting. Use it to set reliable limits on your volume settings and to make sure it's not creeping up in volume over time.

Nobody wants to take the fun out of music. But eventual tinnitus (which is constant ringing in the ears) or permanent hearing loss won't be any fun in the long run, either. By taking sensible precautions and buying smart, you can protect your own and your loved ones' hearing, making sure the music never dies for anyone. 

BY GREGORY ANDERSON

## Consider Kids

**Y**ou have plenty of responsibilities to your kids and protecting them from themselves ranks right up there. But how can you help make sure your children aren't permanently damaging their hearing with portable music players? First, communicate the importance of responsible listening. Take the time to listen to your child's music player, finding the safe maximum volume yourself. Make sure kids take a break from listening—you can even set a maximum time limit per day to ensure that kids don't exceed safe listening periods. Make those rules absolute conditions for keeping the music player, and enforce them when necessary. ●



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# tips

## Keep Your Headphones Clean

1

### Say No To H2O

In-ear headphones collect moisture, which traps dirt and earwax particles and may even corrode and damage the headphones. People who use hearing aids have dealt with this problem for years, and the solution is a simple dehumidifier. They're available at various price points; store your earbuds in the device, and it whisks away moisture far more efficiently than simply leaving the headphones out in the open air to dry. The Audiologists Choice Dry Spot Dehumidifier, for example, is available at Maxi-Aids (\$14.95; [www.maxiaids.com](http://www.maxiaids.com)). Companies such as Warner Tech-Care sell single-use pouches (\$12.15 per dozen; [www.warnertechcare.com](http://www.warnertechcare.com)) that dehumidify earpieces and are designed for travelers.

2

### Think Ahead

When shopping for headphones that have foam earpads or earbuds that aren't as easy to clean as plastic or silicone earpieces, budget for replacement pads or buds. Contact the company before you buy to make sure these extra parts are available and snag a few sets to replace your worn or dirty pads or buds as needed. Third-party companies, such as Sumajin's colorful pads designed for iPod headphones (\$1.30 per pair; [www.sumajin.com](http://www.sumajin.com)), also sell replacement earpads.

3

### A Slick Solution

Products such as Oto-Ease Lubricant (price varies; available at [www.harriscomm.com](http://www.harriscomm.com) and others) were designed specifically for hearing aids, but there's no reason these products won't also work for in-ear headphones. The lubricant makes it easier to insert the earbuds and earpieces, cutting down on the twisting motion that facilitates the accumulation of earwax. Be sure to clean the earpiece thoroughly after each use, or the lubricant may attract dust. Inserting earpieces properly also helps prevent earwax from accumulating on them. Instead of jamming the earpiece in your ear, use your opposite arm to reach over your head and pull upward on the top of your ear to create a larger path for the earpiece.

4

### Wipe Away Your Worries

If the idea of rubbing your expensive headset with hydrogen peroxide makes you uneasy, then maybe pre-moistened wipes will ease your mind. Try Audiowipes Disinfectant Towelettes (price varies; available at sites such as [www.soundbytes.com](http://www.soundbytes.com)), which come in a dispenser or in individual packs and are guaranteed to not harm rubber, plastic, or silicone. Don't use alcohol (or wipes that contain alcohol) because this may damage plastic and irritate your skin. A better bet for a homemade cleaner is the commonly-available 3% solution hydrogen peroxide, which kills bacteria, viruses, and fungus without causing damage or irritation.

5

### An Ounce Of Prevention

Perhaps the best way to keep your headphones clean is to keep your ears clean, but don't swirl swabs around. Do-it-yourself solutions can compact wax inside your ear and may even lead to an ear infection, so consider letting a family physician or ENT (Ear, Nose & Throat) specialist take care of it, as they have special techniques and tools to make your ears squeaky clean.



BY TRACY BAKER

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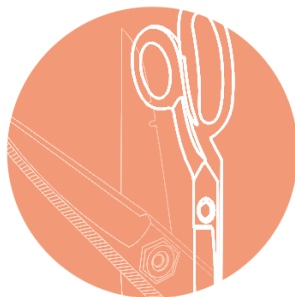
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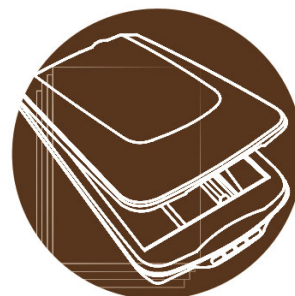
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# The Road To CE Creativity

Become A Creative Techie Guru



Using your tech savoir-faire to create clever artistic projects is easier than you may think. Although some of us may be more blessed than others in the originality department, you can still find ways to use both your right *and* left brain to make unique creations. You wouldn't believe the potential projects awaiting release from your digicam, printer, and PC, and once you get your creative wheel cranking, you may find that you can never look at your CE devices the same way again.

## Knock Out Some Knockoffs

With a little imagination, you can find inspiration in every facet of your life. Take, for example, those decorative bowls you've seen in catalogues. You think one would look fabulous on your dining room table, but you can't get past the sticker shock. Why not create your own version of ornamental wares? You'll

need basic materials to get started: water slide decal paper, water, resin sealer (which you'll find at most craft stores), an ink-jet printer, and a plain "base" for your project. In our instance the base is a large ceramic bowl, but you can use a variety of other objects as your base.

Before you start, there are a couple of things to remember. First, don't limit

yourself. You don't have to use only photos in your project; instead use your computer to print favorite phrases, quotes, or words and themes such as different seasons or time periods. You can use this same line of thinking for what you'll use for your base. We used an ornamental bowl for our dining room, but you can create something for another room in your home. Once you've settled

on a room, keep an open mind when it comes to materials you're willing to work with. You can finally do something with those stashed-away floral vases, give your thrift store lamp an update, or inject some personality into your glass coasters.

## Your Directing Debut

As you create new projects, try to keep your options open when it comes to various media, too. Rather than limiting your film projects to shots taken from a stationary tripod, use innovative shots for a special occasion. Birthdays, anniversaries, weddings—you name it, there's a way you can blend your tech know-how and imagination with your digital camcorder. Have you considered producing a mini-documentary? These personal celebrations present the perfect opportunity to let your inner director shine. Use your digital camcorder to record a unique perspective of these meaningful events—get tight shots of the guest(s) of honor, use a slow zoom during an emotional climax, or pan to keep up with the action of the kids playing with their new puppy. The Canon ZR500 (\$550; [www.canonusa.com](http://www.canonusa.com)) is a great camcorder that lets you capture those moments.

Your original filming doesn't have to end with fun camera shots—put that video to good use. Your PC, along with video-editing software, will let you transfer your artsy video clips, so you can edit, add transitions, and use special effects to maximize the footage you have. Make your home videos the envy of the neighborhood by editing together favorite moments, adding titles, slow dissolves, catchy music tracks, or black-and-white film effects for a great vintage feel. The possibilities are endless with video-editing, and you'll probably find that post-production offers more opportunities to be creative than filming. For the amateur filmmaker we recommend Pinnacle Studio version 10

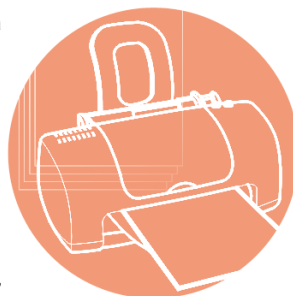
(\$69.99; [www.pinnaclesys.com](http://www.pinnaclesys.com)) for your video-editing endeavors.

## Turn Your World Into Art

If video-editing sounds interesting but seems too time-consuming, photo-editing may be the creative outlet you're looking for. Chances are your digital camera came bundled with photo-editing software. You can take advantage of this software to create inventive wall art, such as a series of black-and-white prints of close-ups of your city's architecture. What we like most about photo-editing is if you find you don't like the alterations you make to a photo, you can easily start over. This gives you the capability of altering a photo in myriad ways until you have created something you are satisfied with.

Just like video-editing, you'll find the more time you spend with a photo-editing program the more comfortable and, thus, original you can get. Depending on the functions your photo-editing software has, you'll likely be able to filter, reduce red-eye, change the hue and saturation, and crop your photos. If your digicam doesn't have photo-editing software, there are a variety of options available such as PhotoPlus 6 (free; [www.freer software.com](http://www.freer software.com)) or ACDSee8 (\$49.99; [www.acdsystems.com](http://www.acdsystems.com)).


Once you're acquainted with your photo-editing program, you can take pictures with an objective. Use an overlying theme or sequence, toss in



some photo effects (such as a blur or colored-pencil effect), and make beautiful prints. If you decide to make large prints, keep in mind that your camera's megapixel resolution may limit quality and size. If you wish to print 8 x 10s, you will need *at least* a 4MP camera to provide satisfactory results; if your prints are any larger, the quality will diminish. If you want to go larger than 8 x 10 prints, then you will likely need to invest in a 7MP digicam for film-quality results.

If you think you'll be taking advantage of making large prints, the 7.1MP Olympus Stylus 710 (\$349.99; [www.olympusamerica.com](http://www.olympusamerica.com)) will satisfy your needs. This camera has 28 shooting modes and takes clear pictures with its Digital Image Stabilization mode. If smaller prints suit your fancy, consider the 4MP Kodak EasyShare Z700 (\$199.95; [www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com)) to create your own small works of art. Despite what camera you choose, you can proudly frame and display your photos as new artwork for your home.

## Start Your Quest

Now that we've mentioned a few ideas, you may look at your CE devices in a different light. To see a few more ideas about what you can create with your digicam, printer, or PC take a look at the rest of the articles in this section. 

BY ASHLEY FINTER



# Digital Camera Projects

## Shooting, Display & Craft Ideas For Your Photos

**W**e all love digital cameras for their slim portability, and we appreciate how adaptable they can be for candid and formal shots alike. But digital photography's immediacy and flexibility mean there's a lot more that you could be doing beyond taking snapshots of parties and vacations.

Here are some projects that you might find fun to undertake on your own and even more fun if you have little assistants ready to help.



### Fill In The Blanks

At nearly any hobby shop or art supply store, you can pick up a frame and mat set in which the mat has multiple cutouts for displaying your photos. You shouldn't have any trouble finding a mat that has cutouts in different shapes: rectangular, square, round, oval. Now go shoot some pictures to fill those holes.

If you have small children who are still developing their view of the world, they'll probably find it a fun project if you take them on a photographic scavenger hunt. Spend an afternoon snapping pictures of things that will correspond to the cutouts' shapes and dimensions. For instance, you could find a doorway for a rectangular cutout, a balloon for a round one, and so on.

If your child is a little older and has begun to pursue their own interests, make it a theme project instead, filling the cutouts with photos that reflect those interests: sports practice and games, music lessons and recitals, rock or bug collecting, and so on.

Finally, for grown-ups, piecing together a thoughtful collection of photos makes a great gift or project for self-expression.

Multicutout mats are beneficial for grouping photographs of family and friends and you probably see them used that way most of the time. However, a more creative option would be to assemble photos that craft a composite look at one person: his favorite places, artistic shots of special corners of her home, or personal items that you instantly associate with her. Your only limit is your imagination.



from magazines and other ready-made sources, but your collage will mean more if you've shot all the photos yourself. Because most collage pictures are relatively small, you don't need a camera with a high megapixel count. A small, easy-to-use compact such as Olympus' 4MP FE-100 (\$199.99; [www.olympusamerica.com](http://www.olympusamerica.com)) should serve you well.

**Decoupage.** This is a process by which one or more pictures are permanently affixed to a surface such as a cabinet, chair, toy chest, and so on. In a nutshell, you'll glue the photo onto the surface to secure it in place, smooth out any crinkles, and then give it at least one coat of decoupage medium to seal and protect it. Take care that everything completely dries between steps. And when using your own pictures, be sure to get your prints made on the highest quality photo paper that you can, rather than budget prints that may smear.

### Then Again, Who Needs A Frame?

Rather than working with a clean frame and mat, maybe you would find it more fun to get a little messy.

**Collage.** With nothing more than a piece of poster board, a stack of pictures, a pair of scissors, and some adhesive, uncountable numbers of people have lost all track of time. In many collage projects, particularly for kids, the pictures come

## Supplies List

Nothing kills a creative buzz like having to interrupt a craft project for a run to the store to get supplies. Before beginning, make sure you know what you need, and that you have plenty on hand. For instance:

- \* Scissors
- \* Poster board
- \* White glue
- \* Glue sticks
- \* Paste
- \* Decoupage medium
- \* Bristle and/or foam brushes
- \* Inkjet or laser photo paper
- \* Spare printer cartridges
- \* Plenty of damp cleanup rags

## Not-So-Fun Projects

Art projects and unbridled creativity are all well and good, but sometimes we have to get serious, too. When you feel like buckling down to business or circumstances demand, here are two projects for which a digital camera is invaluable.

**Take inventory.** Nobody expects the worst, but we plan for it anyway. That's why we pay insurance premiums. Whether you protect your household goods and other valuables with a homeowner's policy or renter's insurance, it's a good idea to keep an up-to-date catalog of your stuff, in case you need to claim a loss. That doesn't just mean a list of makes, models, and serial numbers, but photographs, too.

For small, portable items, take individual shots of each. For larger, stationary items, take wide-angle shots of the room they're in to establish a context for them. Then move in for individual shots or at least close-ups of clustered items, such as a rack of home-theater components.

Keep a collection of photographic prints ready, as well as a CD-R archiving your photo files. But don't keep them at home! Instead, store them in a secure location such as a safe-deposit box.

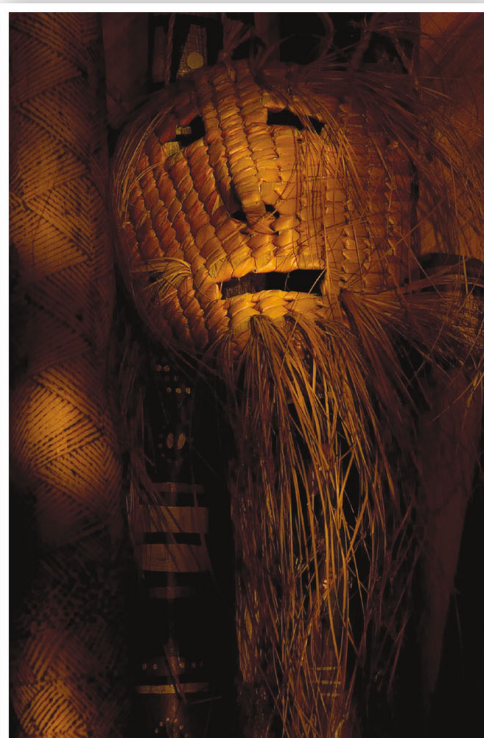
**Crisis response.** Accidents happen, and sometimes they didn't have to. If you or someone close to you is involved in a mishap in which somebody is clearly at fault, it's vital to keep a

cool head and thoroughly document the scene as soon as possible.

Photos can be your best allies in proving your case. We know an accident victim in the midst of litigation who would not have otherwise been able to prove negligence if her partner hadn't thought to quickly photograph the safety hazards that a construction company left overnight in a public place.

As soon as possible after you've shot your photos, sort and archive them in prints and on CD-R, notate pertinent details about them, and write a thorough account of exactly when and where you shot them. If lawyers need to know these details later, you'll be glad you invested the time. ●





When painting with light, the same subject can yield dramatically different results depending on the light source and how you play with it.

## Create A Series Of Light Paintings

The main thing you need for this project is a camera that will let you make long time-exposures by leaving the shutter open for an extended period. We don't mean just the second or two that the camera may need in low-light situations without a flash, either. Leave the shutter open at least 15 or 20 seconds, or, better still, indefinitely. You're likely to find the greatest exposure flexibility on D-SLR cameras, such as Nikon's D70s (\$1,299.99; [www.nikonusa.com](http://www.nikonusa.com)).

First, mount your camera on a tripod and focus on a stationary subject. Even a person will do, as long as he or she remains motionless for the duration. The only requirement for your setting is that it be in near- or total darkness—a pitch-black room, for instance, or outdoors on a night without much of a moon, or after sunset with just a thin glow along the horizon.

Trip your camera's shutter release and, while the long exposure is underway, "paint" your subject with a handheld light. Nearly any kind of light will do: a penlight or flashlight, a laser pointer, or even candles held out-of-frame. Experiment with both time and technique. Jitter the light randomly or let it linger on something for a few moments to make it stand out.

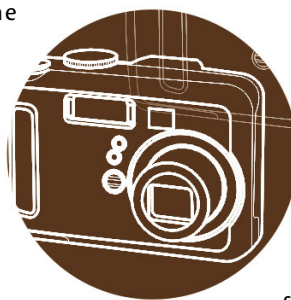
You can get wildly different looking pictures of the same subject, depending on how you've manipulated the light. After each shot, check the results on the camera's display, so you can refine your technique—more or less light, etc.—with the next one.

The wonderful thing about light paintings is that it's impossible to predict the outcome, so the anticipation of

seeing your pictures is heightened that much more.

## Create A Panorama

If you've ever seen a photograph that looks impossibly wide, like a mural of a vast, unfolding landscape, you may have wondered how the photographer accomplished this. It's possible she simply took a wide-angle shot and horizontally cropped away enough to leave a strip-shaped picture, but that's unlikely. For one thing, that's a waste of perfectly good camera resolution. More likely, unless it was taken with a specialized panoramic camera, the photo is a composite of multiple full-size photographs.



Most good photo editors have a tool for stitching together panoramas. In the January 2006 installment of our monthly

## Family-Friendly Cameras

If you have children who love turning photos into raw material for their art projects, you'll need a camera that can withstand the bumps it will inevitably experience. Here are a couple to consider if you're shopping.

**Canon PowerShot SD450**  
(\$449.99; [www.canonusa.com](http://www.canonusa.com))  
This 5MP compact packages Canon's typical wealth of features and excellent image quality in a camera body made of stainless steel with palladium plating. For a camera that will fit in the palm of your hand—and won't overwhelm children's hands, if you're letting them snap a few supervised shots—it feels nicely sturdy.


**Kodak EasyShare V570**  
(\$399.95; [www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com))  
One of the greatest advantages SLR (single-lens reflex) cameras have always had over compact cameras is the ability to switch their lenses. Well, no more! This innovative 5MP compact is ready for any photographic situation with not one lens, but two. The V570 sports both an ultra wide-angle and a 5X telephoto, so each lens can do what it does best without trying to do it all. A large, built-in lens cover slides over the entire assembly when the camera is turned off, transforming the sleek body into a protective hardshell. ●

Know-How article (page 50), we demonstrated how to pull this off in Adobe Photoshop Elements (\$99 Windows, \$89 Mac; [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)), JASC (now Corel) Paint Shop Pro (\$129; [www.corel.com](http://www.corel.com)), and Microsoft Digital Image Pro (\$99.99; [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)). A panorama tool looks for the area of overlap in the photos and then snaps them together almost like puzzle pieces. To create a seamless composite, the program will often shift pixels to make slight adjustments in perspective (so the images match up perfectly) and fade color tones into each other to avoid abrupt shifts.

Of course, you need to start out by shooting photos that contain sufficient overlap to give the editor enough to work with. You can do this by merely eyeballing it, although some cameras can help you eliminate the guesswork. Nikon's entire Coolpix line, including the wide-angle specialist Coolpix 8400 (\$899.95; [www.nikonusa.com](http://www.nikonusa.com)), features a Panorama Assist mode. This superimposes on your viewfinder a translucent copy of the side of the photo you just shot, so you can easily line up the next one. The Canon PowerShot A620 (\$449.99; [www.canon.com](http://www.canon.com)) also features a panorama mode, and it's a bit less expensive than the Coolpix 8400.

After printing (and you'll probably have to take it to a photo lab for professionals and serious amateurs), mounting, and framing, a well-made panorama can be a stunningly beautiful addition to your wall.

### Just Don't Turn It Into Work

Whether it's a rainy day craft project or a photo field trip under clear skies, a project can help you learn more about your camera and your talents and maybe even help train the next generation of artists. Have fun! 

BY BRIAN HODGE



Kodak EasyShare V570 • \$399.95  
[www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com)



# Stretch Your Video Wings

Thoughtful, Fun Video Projects  
For You & Your Family



Sony DCR-DVD105 Handycam Camcorder  
\$599.99  
[www.sony.com](http://www.sony.com)

With the prices—not to mention sizes—of digital camcorders shrinking faster than a cotton tee thrown in a hot dryer, these small and easy-to-use memory-capturing devices should be an integral part of your everyday CE gearbox. There's no reason to earmark the camcorder for special occasions only. Whether you're in the market for a new (or your first) digital video camera or you're happy with your

current model, it's time to stretch your video recording skills beyond the obvious special occasions such as weddings, birthdays, and holidays.

We've put together some ideas to help get you started, as well as suggestions for the tools you'll need to complete these projects. For the best results, think out of the box and look for the spark of something special or unique in what otherwise might seem mundane.

## Time Travel

We've all seen those amazing shots of a flower blooming in seconds instead of hours or days and clouds soaring across a sky, transforming day into night in mere seconds. With a little imagination, some planning, and patience, you can make a time-lapse video that will make time fly. Keep in mind that this technique isn't just fast forwarding through footage. Rather, it's capturing (or

editing) snippets of an event at intervals and then piecing them together.

For a short-term project, choose an event that occurs over the course of several hours or in a single day. If you have a garden, you can capture footage of a flower that opens its petals in the morning and closes them in the evening. For instance, you might film the huge yellow flowers of maturing zucchini plants. You'll need a camcorder with a remote control, such as the new Canon ZR 600 (\$349; [www.canon.com](http://www.canon.com)), to turn the camera on and off; a tripod that can get low to the ground, such as the new Modo 785SHB (MSRP TBA at press time; [www.bogenimaging.us](http://www.bogenimaging.us)), which you can



set as low as 6.1 inches; and software to edit the footage. Any software will do as long as it lets you edit frames, but for Windows, we like Adobe Premiere Elements 2.0 (\$99; [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)).

Mac users should check out the new iMovie, part of iLife '06 (\$79; [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)).

You'll need to know how long it takes for the flower to open its petals before you start shooting. If it takes longer than an hour, which is the maximum length of most DV (digital video) tapes, for example, you'll need to shoot at intervals, capturing at least 10 to 15 seconds for each interval shot. Once you're finished, transfer the footage to your computer, edit it down to a series of short clips,

and select a dissolve transition to go from one scene to the other. You can then burn it to a DVD using your editing software or email it to a friend. Many video-editing programs, including Movie Maker 2 from Microsoft (free; [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)), will compress the video to email size for you.

If flowers aren't your thing, try a time-lapse video of someone doing a puzzle, painting a room, planting a garden, or, if you're really dedicated, building a house. For a really cool effect, try editing out the people in these shots, so you have the illusion of magical completion.

### Mini Spielbergs

Given the option, most kids (at least the ones we know) love to perform in front of the camera. But instead of Mom or

## Genealogy: Video Style

Preserving family history can be much more than just gathering old photos and putting them in an album. Although photo albums are wonderful memory keepers, they lack the breadth and depth of a video. And with video you can incorporate your still images for the best of both worlds.

Family history is often passed down from one family member to another through stories and reminiscences, so it's important to capture those memories on video before they disappear. One way to do that is to set up your camcorder and interview different family members about their lives and their memories. It might be fun to have your

children interview their cousins and grandparents.

Some people may be acutely aware that they're being videotaped, so it's up to you to make them feel at ease and forget that the camera is there. Be patient; it may take a while for them to open up. You may also want to do more than one session with each person and be sure to get some footage of couples and families together.

At the same time, start gathering complementary video, music, still photos, and memorabilia such as newspaper articles, medals/awards, and even a favorite piece of jewelry or a scarf. You can scan the images and memorabilia and then incorporate

them into the video, adding a richness that would be difficult to accomplish otherwise.

This is definitely a long-term project and, in fact, you may want to continue adding to the video as time passes. In order to be effective, you'll need to spend time editing all the elements that will make up your heritage video so choose a video-editing program you're comfortable with. In addition to Adobe Premiere Elements 2.0 and Roxio Easy Media Creator 8, we recommend Ulead VideoStudio 9 (\$99.99 full version, \$49.99 for an upgrade; [www.ulead.com](http://www.ulead.com)).

Whatever program you use, make sure it lets you

cut and assemble scenes and add titles and music.

Once you're done—or at least done with one chapter in your family history—burn a DVD and send copies to your family. Everyone will treasure the gem you have created.

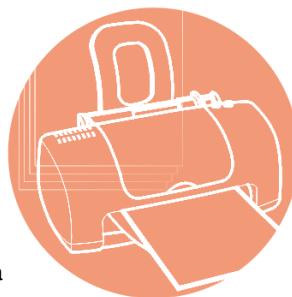
It's a good idea to hang onto all—or most—of your footage, so you might want to create an archive organized by date or subject matter. Because video files are huge and will gobble up hard drive space, store the footage on an external hard drive, such as the Maxtor One Touch III (starting at \$159.95; [www.maxtor.com](http://www.maxtor.com)). You should also back up these video archives on DVD. ●



Dad as videographers, why not let the kids produce their own video? This is a great weekend project, especially if the kids are having a sleepover with their friends. Chances are they won't need any help to come up with ideas, but if they do, have several on hand. You could, for example, suggest using a popular movie or a book for the basis of the video. Or have them create the video based on something they've learned in school such as: What would it be like to live on the moon without gravity? Or have them reenact a particular event in history. You can even throw out silly scenarios such as: What if everything—floors, chairs, houses—were made of JELL-O?

Assign everyone a specific job—director, producer, camera person, costume designer, etc. If they're older, have them draw up storyboards outlining the different scenes before they start. Then,

stay out of the way and let them do their thing. Once they're done, help them edit the footage on the computer, adding titles, music, and credits, and burn DVDs for each of the kids using a program such as Roxio Easy Media Creator 8 (\$99.99; [www.roxio.com](http://www.roxio.com)). We like iTunes for managing music; it's cross platform (PC and Mac), and it's free ([www.itunes.com](http://www.itunes.com)). You can also design and burn a label for the DVDs using one of several Epson printers, including the all-in-one Epson Stylus Photo RX700 (\$399.99; [www.epson.com](http://www.epson.com)).



tough, especially when your kids are young and grandparents are miles away. Why not supplement visits, telephone calls, photos, letters, and email with an occasional video? We're not talking about the standard stuff here.

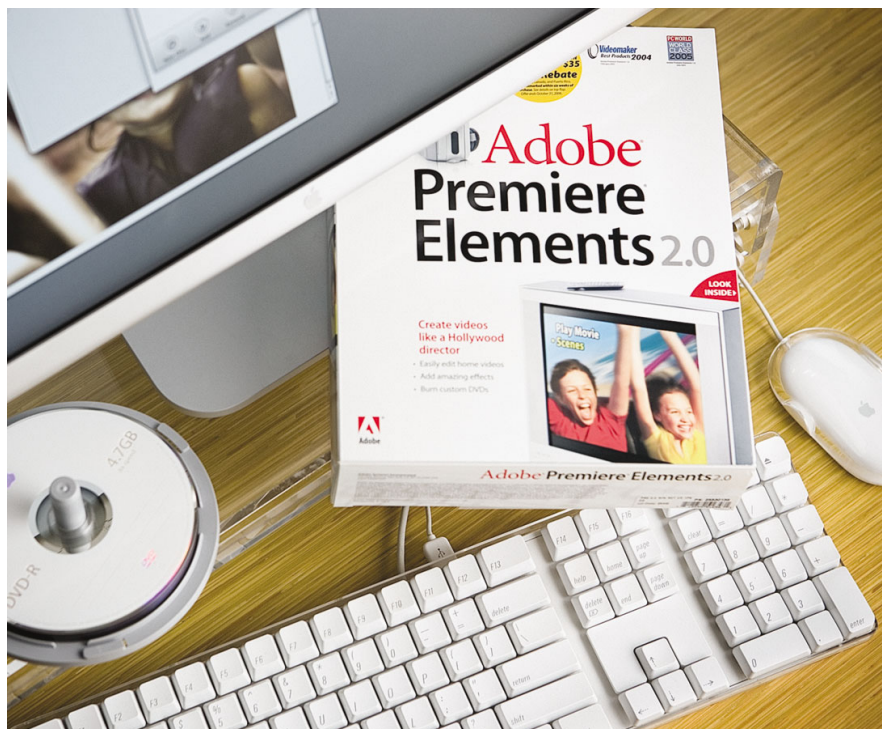
Rather, have Grandma and/or Grandpa read some bedtime stories to the kids in front of the video camera. If they don't have a video camera, use yours on the next family visit. Set the video camera on a solid surface or on a tripod, give the Grandparents a couple of the children's favorite storybooks, and have them read aloud, so when the visit is over, the Grandchild/ Grandparent connection will be available at the touch of a button. For capturing

### Virtual Grandparents

Keeping close ties with the out-of-town members of your family can be

Canon Optura 600  
\$1,099 • [www.canon.com](http://www.canon.com)

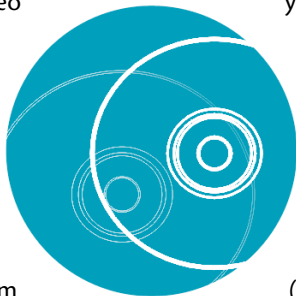




this virtual story time, you might want to record directly to a DVD using a DVD camcorder such as the Sony DCR-DVD 105 DVD Handycam (\$599.99; [www.sony.com](http://www.sony.com)) or the Panasonic VDR-D200 (\$599.95; [www.panasonic.com](http://www.panasonic.com)). For quick and easy editing, use a program such as muvee's autoProducer 5 (\$99.95; [www.muvee.com](http://www.muvee.com)). The application has 24 built-in thematic styles, so you can create a razzle-dazzle video with just a few clicks of the mouse.

### Transfer Analog To Digital

Chances are you have some old video footage on VHS tapes or even 8mm film sitting on the shelves or in the closet. Unfortunately, analog media deteriorates over time, which means losing those memories forever, so it's time to preserve them by digitizing the footage.



Digitizing analog tapes is actually pretty simple if you have the right equipment. Most digital camcorders, such as the Canon Optura 600 (\$1,099; [www.canon.com](http://www.canon.com)) are capable of receiving an analog signal from a VCR or TV via audio/video cables. Put the VHS tape in your VCR, attach the camcorder, and copy the footage to the camcorder. Because the Optura 600 has an SD (SecureDigital) card slot, you can even transfer the tape directly to the media card for easy transfer to your computer.


Another option is to use a VCR/DVD recorder combo machine, such as the Lite-On LVC-9006 (\$299.99; [www.liteonamericas.com](http://www.liteonamericas.com)). Put a VHS tape in one slot, a blank DVD in the other, and record. It's quick and easy.

Digitizing 8mm film isn't quite as simple as transferring VHS footage. If you want

## No Camcorder? No Worries

Most digital still cameras have a video mode, so even if you don't have a full-blown DV (digital video) camcorder, you can still create memorable and fun video footage. Digital cameras such as the Casio EXILIM S600 (\$399.99; [www.casio.com](http://www.casio.com)) and the Sony Cyber-shot DSC-M2 (\$499.95; [www.sony.com](http://www.sony.com)) have excellent video capabilities. (The Sony M2 even records sound in stereo.) You won't have the same controls as a dedicated camcorder, but you'll be able to capture some great footage.

There's no need to whip out the big tripod either. Check out the very cool and portable gorillapod (\$24.95; [www.joby.com](http://www.joby.com)). This fun little tripod has flexible arms that wrap securely around a railing, a chair leg, etc., so you can set up your camera anywhere. (It can stand on its own, too.) Kids can even attach it to a backpack and create a "this is the world as I see it" video. ●

to do it yourself, the simplest method is to project the 8mm film onto a white background. Set your DV camcorder on a tripod, zoom in as tightly as possible, and press record. The digital copy will likely show some flicker, so this method isn't perfect. You can also check with your local photo store to see if it offers a transfer service. A professional transfer isn't cheap, but you should get better quality. 

BY THEANO NIKITAS



# CE Projects Just For Kids

## Banish Boredom With These Challenging Ideas

Kodak EasyShare C340  
\$179.95 • [www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com)



**T**oo bad boredom isn't limited to the winter-time blahs. Kids are quick to let you know that "there's nothing to do." With a few CE staples—a PC, printer, and digicam or camcorder—and a little encouragement, however, your kids will find plenty to do.

We have a few ideas, and we'll start with something simple to capture their attention and build on their abilities.

### Keep Everyone Current

Here's a way to keep your close relatives up-to-speed with your child's activities: Compose a family newsletter. Sounds boring, your teens say? It need not be.

Grandparents would love to receive a letter with updates from your kids about their good grades, music recitals, sporting activities, and other important events. It lets you note milestones, such as baby's first trip to the zoo. Each child who is old enough could write a paragraph or two about themselves and select a relevant photo to include.

Gradeschoolers don't need to be intimidated formatting a newsletter, and they don't need special software. Open Microsoft Word and use the Insert, Picture command to import your digital pics. Use options in the Format menu to tweak the look.

Because this and so many other fun CE projects revolve around digital photos, now might be a good time to consider

a new camera for yourself or the kids. Many models, such as the Sony Cyber-shot DSC-S600 (\$199.95; [www.sonystyle.com](http://www.sonystyle.com)), are ideal for families. This 6MP camera has 32MB of on-board memory, which holds roughly 10 high-res pictures (you'll still want to buy a memory card); a 3X optical wide-angle zoom lens; and a flash with a range of 33 feet.

A quality first-time camera for kids is Kodak's new 5MP EasyShare C340 (\$179.95; [www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com)). For yourself, consider the 6.1MP EasyShare C663 (\$299.95), the first camera to incorporate Kodak's Perfect Touch technology. Kodak's proprietary film and picture-processing technology lets you correct flaws—such as underexposure—right on the camera.

### A Flippin'-Good Album

Once you've settled on a camera and the kids are ready for another project, it's time to create a digital photo album. Don't settle for a run-of-the-mill online



PhotoFrost MagicFrost  
Mark V

\$379 • [www.photofrost.com](http://www.photofrost.com)



## The Young Ones

Young children need opportunities for creative self-expression, and moms periodically need those times to be quiet and self-directed. Kid Pix Deluxe 4 Home Edition (\$39.99; [www.broderbund.com](http://www.broderbund.com)) can help. Children as young as 4 can enjoy making virtual works of art using paint, pencils, and chalk in Realistic Mode or painting with goofy items such as balloons and other Crazy Art Tools. They can start with a blank canvas or paint existing templates and print the project when they're finished. With a little help

from you or an older sibling, the little ones can import photos and use text to write and illustrate stories and poems.

Another good project for young kids marries two of our favorite things: CE products and the kitchen. Kids love messy kitchen projects, such as frosting cookies and cakes. Imagine how much they would love helping you create a photo cake to celebrate a special occasion.

PhotoFrost ([www.photofrost.com](http://www.photofrost.com)) makes printers for hobbyists and professionals that produce

edible icing sheets imprinted with digital images. The MagicFrost Mark V printer, scanner, and copier (\$379) works with any computer, but you can use it without the PC, as well. Use the printer to reduce or enlarge photos up to 400% at a 9,600dpi resolution. The Mark V comes with 50 icing sheets in two sizes, one set of color cartridges, a cleaner cartridge set, and software. Your youngsters could assist you with the photo selection and editing, cake baking, and decorating.

To give the kids more hands-on fun and to save

money, try making a photo cake with tips found at the Fabulous Foods Cooking School Web site ([www.fabulousfoods.com/school](http://www.fabulousfoods.com/school)).

The basic steps are:

1. Trace the outline of a photo or image using a non-toxic crayon and edible rice paper.
2. Trim the design to fit the borders of your cake and center it on the cake.
3. Outline the design with dark frosting and fill it in with frosting of the colors of your choice.
4. Re-outline the image with frosting. ●



## The Perfect Gift

**M**ultitasking moms know the benefits of maximizing effort. Your kids' CE projects can do the same: Projects can entertain and educate your children as they create enduring gifts and mementos.

Projects such as a DVD slideshow of family photos or a book of recipes passed through the generations are fun to create and a joy to give to those we love.

Here's another idea: Let your kids burn CDs of music their grandparents enjoy, such as jazz, big-band, or gospel, and have them present it to

your folks for Grandparents' Day, Valentine's Day, or another special occasion. Encourage them to draw and color a CD cover for a more meaningful touch.

Let them scan in old photos of their grandparents and other family members to create and frame a collage. The kids can use their digi-cam's software or a photo-editing program to cover flaws. Online photo services such as Shutterfly ([www.shutterfly.com](http://www.shutterfly.com)) offer free photo-editing programs, or you can buy a powerful program such as

Adobe Photoshop Elements 4.0 (\$99.99; [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)).

Finally, here's a gift idea that will give, as long as the kids keep making it—a 12-month calendar full of their pictures. Use the services at Shutterfly or Snapfish ([www.snapfish.com](http://www.snapfish.com)). At Shutterfly kids can create 12-month (\$19.99) and 18-month (\$24.99) calendars, and Snapfish sells 12-month calendars (\$18.99). Both sites offer quantity discounts. ●

bikes or skateboards at the local park. Let your kids record the fun and edit the footage, add a soundtrack, and burn the film to DVDs to give to their friends.

If you need a camcorder, you have many models from which to choose. JVC has five new MiniDV camcorders, ranging from \$300 to \$450 ([www.jvc.com](http://www.jvc.com)). You can film in widescreen ratio (16:9), and the camcorders all have a 2.5-inch LCD. The GR-D330 (\$330) features Live Slow, with which the kids can film in slow motion but record audio in real time. It captures still images and has an SD/MMC (SecureDigital/MultiMediaCard) slot.

## Dish Up Family Recipes

Here's an idea for busy families: Compile a family cookbook. It's not time-sensitive, so your kids can work on it bit by bit. Let them choose their favorite recipes—don't forget to add yours—and have them solicit recipes from relatives, too.

display. Let your kids create an album with FlipAlbum 6 Suite (\$69.95; [www.flipalbum.com](http://www.flipalbum.com)).

Anyone viewing a flip album can turn the pages on her PC's screen or let FlipViewer turn the pages automatically. Kids have tons of ways to customize each album with themes, borders, and special effects. They can make it more personal by adding their favorite MP3 files as background music. When they're finished, they can burn the album on a CD or DVD or share it online. FlipAlbum is also good for creating virtual books. Encourage your kids to use this software to compile and illustrate their works of poetry, essays, or short stories.

## Rip & Burn The Oldies

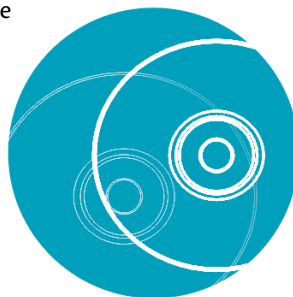
So your daughter thinks you're as dated as the music you like. But we know Hillary Duff and the rest of today's teeny

boppers have nothing on Joan Jett, Pat Benatar, and the other First Ladies of '80s rock. Give your teen some CDs of your favorite artists and ask her to compile (and listen to) Mom's Hit List. If you don't have the songs on CD, give her permission to find and buy them online. If you need a good CD- and DVD-burning program, try Nero 7 Ultra Edition (\$99.99; [www.nero.com](http://www.nero.com)).

## Tape A Talent Show

Kids need unstructured time with their friends, but often they have only enough time to swap emails, text messages, and phone calls. Let them invite their friends over for an afternoon of silly fun that they capture on video. They could put on a talent show or fashion preview (with "outfits" they've designed) or jump their

Make one of the recipes each week (or month). Let the kids help you and have them take photos as the food is prepared and when it's finished. Then, have them type in the recipe and step-by-step instructions on the PC and import their photos.



Print the pages, laminate them, and preserve them in a binder. They not only have a good first cookbook to take when they leave the nest, but you have a ready-made gift for family members.

Try one or two of these ideas, and we'll bet your kids will think of other great projects to do with a computer, camera, and other peripherals. Better yet, their boredom will be banished without the help of the TV or gaming console. **CE**

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

# COMPLETE THE DREAM...HOME



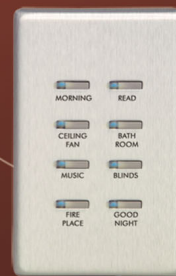
Envision a home that automatically anticipates all of your needs. Just before going to bed, you roll over and touch the "Good Night" button, which turns on the motion activated outdoor lights, arms the security system, locks the doors and gently fades off all the lights in the house. Sitting in your home theater, you lightly press the button labeled "Movie" and the shades are drawn, the lights are dimmed, the projection system turns on along with the surround-sound system, and the movie starts. A Vantage system manages all of today's technology and provides complete control to every system in your house, putting the finishing touches on your dream home.



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# Photo Projects For Your Home

A Picture's Worth A Thousand Words . . .  
As Long As It Leaves Your Camera



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**Y**ou have a keen eye for taking photographs—but because they rarely leave your camera, computer, or memory card, no one sees them but you. Fortunately, even if you're short on time, cash, or wall space, there are lots of ways for you to enjoy your special photos someplace other than an LCD. Whether you're a craft-phobic gadget diva or the queen of do-it-yourself, there is a perfect creative decorating project to get your photos on display.

## Spring Cleaning

Chances are, hiding among the hoards of digital images you've shot and the prints you've collected in boxes and albums, there are a few spectacular standouts that may not seem worthy of framing on their own, but that would make a compelling display if grouped together by theme—vacation photos, for instance, or panoramas. The best way to begin your decorating project is to get familiar with your photo collection: Weed out the bad shots and group together the images that have something in common.

As you sort through them, you may discover that you have accumulated a lovely series of sunrises, which would look fantastic hung together in your bedroom. Grouping a series of baby pictures or wedding photographs from

several generations, for example, can turn a wall of regular photos into an engaging and meaningful display. If you feel daunted by the project, set aside an hour one day and let yourself begin. Once you've started, it's easy to gain momentum.

You may find that having good photo software helps. Coolect (\$49.95 on CD; \$39.95 download; [www.coolect.com](http://www.coolect.com)) is popular in scrapbooking circles because it lets you add audio notes and journal entries to the images you import; you can also link images together. If you're willing to spend a little more and plan to manipulate your photos, Adobe's Photoshop Elements (\$99.99; [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)) and Corel's Paint Shop Pro (\$129.99; [www.corel.com](http://www.corel.com)) are excellent photo-editor programs, which also come with top-notch file-organizing features.

## Printing Options

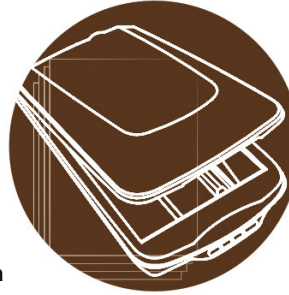
Once you've selected the images you want to work with and tinkered with them in your photo editor until they're just right, your next big step will be printing. The resolution of your photo might affect the size of the print you make. For example, you aren't likely to get good prints if you enlarge images taken at less than 4MP to 8 x 10 inches or larger.

If you want to keep things simple and not invest in any at-home equipment, you can print from kiosks—there are roughly 70,000 Kodak photo kiosks worldwide, for instance—or send your images off to a lab. HP's Snapfish ([www.snapfish.com](http://www.snapfish.com)) and Kodak's EasyShare

Gallery ([www.kodakgallery.com](http://www.kodakgallery.com)) are both popular online services where you can have prints and enlargements made inexpensively. Additionally, both services offer special features.

At Kodak's site, for example, you may print photos directly onto archival-quality artists' canvases (\$89.99) or into single-print/multi-image collages (\$2.99 to \$29.99).

If you'd like to set up your own digital photo printing lab, investing in a top-notch printer, such as the Epson Picture-Mate Express Edition (\$149.99; [www.epson.com](http://www.epson.com)) or the Epson Stylus Photo R1800 (\$549), is a must. You will be limited in the size of prints you can make by the printer you buy, so be sure to consider this when making your decision.



Hasselblad 503CW  
\$4,054

[www.hasselbladusa.com](http://www.hasselbladusa.com)

## Revitalize Vintage Photos

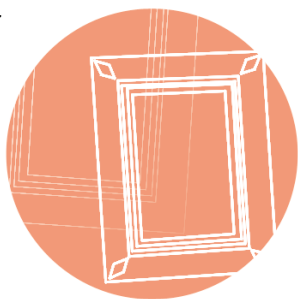
To touch up and reprint vintage photos, begin by scanning your prints using a good flatbed scanner such as the Epson Perfection 4490 PHOTO (\$249.99; [www.epson.com](http://www.epson.com)), which includes one-touch color restoration for aging photos and Digital ICE software for dust and scratch removal. Next, use a good photo-editing program, such as Microsoft Digital Image 2006 Standard (\$49.95; [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)), to correct imperfections or adjust the contrast. Then, make the highest quality prints you can afford of your refurbished images, and they'll be yours to hang and enjoy for many years to come. ●



## Hanging Out

Once you have your prints, the fun really begins. There are so many great options for hanging photos that you can easily fill your walls in a way that perfectly suits your sense of style, expresses your own creativity, and matches the rest of your décor.


Large collections of photos look best when hung close together. Keep the edges of the frames less than two inches apart and try to shape them into a rough rectangle or square.



When planning your layout, it helps to start by creating a loose grid on a table top or floor. When you have an arrangement you love, move the photos one-by-one up to the wall. You can also create a stair-step pattern that works its way up along a staircase or mix and match vintage-style frames to create an artsy, salon-like feel. Hanging identical frames in a straight vertical or horizontal line creates a satisfying look, as well.

If the idea of trying to get all of your photos artfully framed, matted, and

evenly hung throughout your house strikes you as overwhelming, invest in a kit, such as Perfect Picturewall (\$350; [www.thepicturewallcompany.com](http://www.thepicturewallcompany.com)), which comes with 10 wood-and-Plexiglas frames (in several colors), archival mats, hardware, and two reusable templates that make it simple to hang as many as 13 photos (some of the frames hold more than one) in a perfect grid.

With editing, printing, and hanging made easy, you now have no excuse for keeping your photos shut away from the world. 

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

## Tips From A Pro

New York City-based photographer, Elizabeth Solaka, ([www.elizabethsolaka.com](http://www.elizabethsolaka.com)) has shot everything from the weddings of Broadway stars to professional basketball and the backstage action of rock group 98 Degrees. We asked her for five of her best bits of advice for editing, framing, and hanging photographs, and here's what she says:

**1** If it doesn't contribute to the image, crop it out. Cropping photos can make all the difference between a good and great photo. On my Web site, there is a stunning photo of Tilda Swinton, where only half of her face is showing. The half that I cropped out was very bright, and it distracted from the beautiful subtle tones of her right

side, so I just cropped it out altogether.

**2** It's important not to let your equipment prevent you from moving forward. My favorite film camera is the Hasselblad 503CW (\$4,054—body, 80mm Zeiss Lens and film magazine; [www.hasselblad.se](http://www.hasselblad.se)), the preferred brand of camera for top fashion/commercial photographers. It is pricey, but I have also taken some of my favorite photos from my Holga, a \$20 plastic camera with a plastic lens. The digital camera I use for roaming around New York is the Nikon D70 (\$979—body only; [www.nikonimaging.com](http://www.nikonimaging.com).)

**3** Photoshop is a wonderful tool, even if you only use a few of its features. I like the Auto Levels

feature because it ensures a good print. Sometimes this feature erases all the beauty of the color, though. (If this happens, go to Edit and select Undo.) I also recommend using the filter “Unsharp Mask” to sharpen the image. This almost always makes the image look better if you don't overdo it.

**4** Food tastes better if it is made with love, and images look better if they are framed with care. When having art professionally framed, look for someone with experience who loves art and has lots of examples displayed in the store. The best place to find used frames is at yard sales or Goodwill stores. You can find beautiful vintage frames—in solid brass, hand-carved wood, pressed aluminum, and even silver.

**5** Hanging all frames at exactly the same height is a frustrating and daunting task, causing grief and dozens of unwanted holes in your wall. Most of my exhibitions have a playful, salon-style, presentation with a variety of frames. 57 inches is the standard height for hanging frames, but I generally don't comply with that standard. It's nearly impossible to make the pictures look perfectly aligned. I simply place my photos haphazardly, yet harmoniously and playfully on the wall. The eye is led from one image to another. I place the images that require closer scrutiny (details are important) at eye level. The grander images usually go higher up on the wall. ●



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# Editor's Top 10

## Reasons I Love Getting Creative With CE

*CE Lifestyles* editor Katie Sommer is a closet craft-aholic. Here's why she loves using CE devices to help with all of her projects.



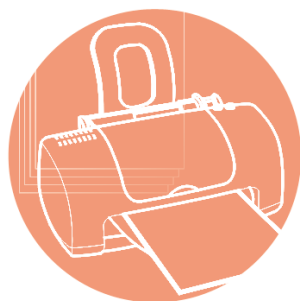
With the correct software, personalizing anything is a snap.

With a digital camera, a printer, and free online templates, your scrapbook will be the envy of the neighborhood.



The best artwork is the kind that is meaningful in some way, and digital cameras let us easily create beautiful prints that are important to us.

You can dazzle a group of your friends and family by using your digital camera, digital camcorder, photo- and video-editing software, a DVD-R, and a big-screen TV to display a combination slideshow and video clip DVD of a milestone, such as a college graduation or a 50th wedding anniversary.



The most meaningful gifts are those that are the most personal; give Grandma a DVD of the kids' milestones that you created using your digital camcorder and DVD-burning software.

The above idea is even cooler if you use publishing software to create custom DVD covers with a personalized message and give them as gifts.



Making your own photo prints, invitations, place cards, and similar items with the help of a computer and software can cost a fraction of what designers and retailers charge for them.

Getting your kids involved is easy. Give them a digital camera, turn them loose to snap some photos of the yard and pets, print them on your home photo printer, and let their imaginations run wild with some glue, scissors, and paper.

Even if it's not necessarily fun, using a spreadsheet, a digital camera, and a CD-R to document your valuables for insurance purposes is an important project for any homeowner.

You'll never be caught without a thoughtful card—just keep a ream of nice white cardstock and create one with your computer and printer whenever you need it.

# Lifestyle Close-Up Tips

## Get The Entire Family Involved

### Personalize A 12-Month Calendar

Create a fun calendar on your computer using software such as Broderbund's Calendar Creator 12 (\$19.99; [www.broderbund.com](http://www.broderbund.com)). Ask family members to submit digital photos for the main art and choose special images to mark specific months. For example, use a photo of Aunt Jane working diligently in her beautiful garden for May or Cousin Billy dressed in his Spider-Man costume for October. Enter birthdays, anniversaries, and other special family events. Making a family calendar to commemorate Grandma's birthday and your sister's wedding anniversary might even become a new family tradition.

### Lights, Camera, Action

Slide into the director's chair and get the entire family involved in filming a creative home video. Use a digital camcorder to interview members of the family one by one; keep the camera rolling to capture candid footage of them, as well. Ask specific questions about their most cherished family moments. Pass the digicam around to give everyone a chance to be behind the camera. Learn about Grandpa's favorite invention of all time; hear what your mother's favorite pastime is; and ask your little niece to share a few words of her 5-year-old "wisdom."



There's plenty of work to be done in completing a genealogy project, so get the whole family involved. One group can be in charge of gathering old photos from family members and taking new photos with the digital camera. A few people can conduct research, while another team can work on the computer using family history software, such as RootsMagic (\$29.95; [www.rootsmagic.com](http://www.rootsmagic.com)). Ask the youngsters to help out with the photos and the more arts-and-crafts aspects of the project, such as turning the project into a decorative book to present at the next family reunion.


### Create A Family Collage

Encourage each person in your family to choose a day to carry around the digital camera, snapping photos they think are interesting, that represent their personalities or relate to a specific theme they have chosen. Print two or three photos from each family member's collection. Gather those involved to help in crafting a large collage that reveals traits and characteristics of each person. Proudly display your family's masterpiece in a central location, such as your grandmother's house, for everyone to see and enjoy for years to come.

### Build A Genealogy

Create a pictorial family history that will be treasured and appreciated by many.

### Revamp The Age-Old Slideshow

The days of large, bulky slide projectors are long gone. Your family can create a beautiful slideshow using a computer and its basic software. For example, you can use a feature integrated in Windows XP. Store digital photos in the My Pictures folder and select View As A Slide Show in the menu on the left. Your photos will appear one-by-one on a black background. Get even more creative with a photo program, such as Plus! Photo Story 2 (\$14.99; [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)), that lets you add voice narration, musical background, text, and more. Burn the digital slideshow to a CD and send it to family and friends. 

BY LINNÉ OURADA



# Digital Photo Project

## Photo Magnets



Most of our fridges have at least a handful of photos tacked on them; it's a great way to display favorite snapshots. But if you want to clean off some of that clutter, turn your photos into these fun magnets. And don't limit yourself to the kitchen—these are perfect for your office, and a set of them makes a great gift for grandparents.



### SUPPLIES:

- Unused bottle caps (we bought ours from a local home brew store)
- Copies of favorite photos (reduced, if needed, so desired areas will fit into a 1-inch circle) printed on cardstock
- 1-inch hole punch
- Tweezers (if needed)
- Tacky glue
- Epoxy solution
- Heavy duty silicone glue
- White glue
- Small decorative elements, such as paper glitter or gold leaf (optional)
- 3/4-inch diameter magnets

### DIRECTIONS:

Many bottle caps have a plastic sealant in them. If yours does, use the tweezers to pull out the plastic and throw it away.

Then, punch out the area of the photo you want to use on your magnet.

Spread a thin layer of tacky glue on the back of the photo circles and press them to the inside of the caps. Make sure there are no air bubbles. When they're dry, spread a thin layer of white glue over the photos and let it dry. This will act as a sealant for the photos against the epoxy.

Mix your epoxy solution according to your kit's directions. Follow the directions carefully (epoxy is sensitive stuff) and make sure you mix it in a well-ventilated area. Spread out your caps on a level surface and pour a small amount of the epoxy inside the bottle caps, over the photos. Make sure the photo is well-covered; the epoxy should be around 1 centimeter deep.


If you choose to use any decorative elements, carefully place them on top of the solution before the epoxy dries. We

### TIPS:

- Use the underside of the hole punch to center your photos properly. No more guessing!
- Use a stick pin to submerge your decorative elements in the liquid epoxy for a neat "floating" look.
- Don't limit yourself to photos—use printouts of seasonal themes such as a flower, a raindrop, and a sun for the month of April.
- If you want to use used bottle caps (say, from beer or soda bottles), clean them carefully and flare the edges with some needle-nosed pliers.

like the look of gold leaf and paper glitter around the edge of the photos.

Let the caps dry completely. Most solutions say to let them sit undisturbed for around three days.

When everything is dry, use the heavy-duty glue to attach the magnets to the back of the bottle caps. Let these dry completely. Then, use them! As we said above, a set of these make a great, personalized gift, and they'll look great on a fridge or the drawers of a metal desk. 

BY KATIE SOMMER



**NEW**  
**AVG Anti-Virus**  
**plus Firewall**

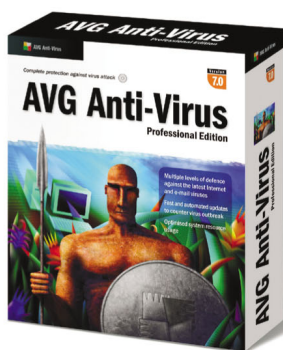
## The best testimonial from 25 million users: They barely realize they use us!

With more than 25 million loyal users worldwide, Grisoft is the best choice for people and companies seeking maximum virus protection. With its easy and intuitive interface, Grisoft AVG Anti-Virus software doesn't bog down system resources; instead, it works quickly and seamlessly. Our singular focus on your protection lets YOU work - not worry. Our new product, AVG Anti-Virus plus Firewall, offers the best protection of your privacy against hackers.

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easy on users.**



# Got The Digital Camera Battery Blues?

Digicams & Their Power Sources



PowerShot A620  
\$399.99 • [www.canon.com](http://www.canon.com)

**B**attery life has always been an Achilles heel of digital photography, and though there have been tremendous improvements in battery technology and controlling digital camera power consumption, sooner or later all batteries run out of juice. And if you know how annoying (or heartbreaking) it is when they run out during your daughter's first t-ball game or your son's prom pre-party, take careful note of the choices you can make and the ways you can properly manage your digital camera's batteries.

## Where Does The Power Go?

There's a reason digital cameras are considered high-drain devices. Every time you use the zoom, press the shutter, trigger the flash, play back an image, or change a setting in the menu, you're draining power from the battery, and the vast majority of cameras on today's market have all those features and more. It also takes energy to write image data to the media card, and lighting up those LCDs doesn't come cheap, especially considering how huge so many of them are.

However, when it comes to batteries, photographers have essentially two choices—proprietary rechargeable Li-Ion (lithium ion) batteries and AA batteries—and the camera you buy pretty much dictates what you end up with.

### Proprietary Li-Ion Batteries—What You Get Is What You Use

On the plus side, proprietary rechargeable Li-Ion batteries are generally economical since they're rechargeable and last a long time, and the battery and charger will be included with the camera. However, you need to be vigilant about keeping the battery charged because, unless there's an electrical outlet nearby and you have the charger with you, there are no other options if you run out and don't have a spare. Even though these proprietary batteries can be expensive (figure around \$50 or so), it's a good idea to buy a second battery and keep it charged as a backup.

The mantra for digital camera manufacturers lately is that smaller is in. Because most digicams on the market today are small and slender, their power source has to be diminutive as well. While these miniature batteries provide less power than those used in digital SLRs, smaller cameras generally require less power, so you can get some decent shooting capacity out of one charge. Some cameras, like the razor-thin Casio Exilim EX-Z750 and the new Casio S600 (both \$399.99; [www.casio.com](http://www.casio.com)) have CIPA (Camera and Imaging Products Association) ratings of 325 and 300 snapshots, respectively, on a fully charged battery. (See the "CIPA Standards" sidebar for more information.) Although 300 is a little above average, we managed to shoot more images than that, getting close to 400 images from the EX-Z750 and about 340 from the S600. Granted, our testing methods were less stringent than CIPA, but we shot as we normally would, using the zoom and playback, erasing images, etc.

### AA-Compatible Cameras—The Battery Choice Is Yours

With AA-compatible digital cameras, the battery choice is yours. These cameras use either two or four AA batteries. Because AA batteries are readily available at stores around the world, you're never far from a power source, even if you are far from home. But, unless

you're in a real bind, don't just choose any AA battery.

Many AA-compatible cameras come bundled with regular AA alkaline batteries, but we don't recommend using them because the life of a AA alkaline battery in a digital camera is exceedingly short. Instead, use them for the kitchen clock or for your daughter's new electronic toy.

## CIPA Standards

**C**IPA (Camera and Imaging Products Association) is an organization that provides standards for rating the performance of digital cameras, including battery life. Requirements for testing include factory settings of image quality and pixel number. Other guidelines are: Flash is used for 50% of the test shots, which are taken at specified intervals; the zoom is engaged before every

picture is taken (or twice before every second picture is taken); and the LCD is left on throughout the testing, and the camera is powered off at specified intervals.

You'll find the CIPA ratings in the camera's specifications, along with the type of battery/batteries used for testing. If it's not listed, contact the manufacturer for further information. ●

## Battery Smarts

**H**ere are some things you should know about rechargeable NiMH batteries:

- NiMH batteries have a finite life cycle, which is the number of times they can be charged. Life span depends on usage patterns (for example, the charge rate and charger used), but you'll be able to charge and use these batteries hundreds of times.
- Generally a fast charger (one hour or less) will charge the batteries to only about 80% to 85% capacity. This means fewer pictures per charge, and it can also shorten the lifespan of the battery.
- Generally a slow charger (at least five hours) will charge the batteries closer to 100% capacity.
- NiMH batteries lose 1% of their charge per day (more if stored at higher temperatures, like 95 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit). But don't put them in the fridge—condensation could form on the contacts and potentially corrode the batteries, rendering them useless or worse, causing leakage of caustic chemicals.
- Higher mAh (the amount of energy that can be used to power a device) delivers longer per-charge power than lower mAh batteries, but they have somewhat shorter life cycles.
- Overcharging a battery can shorten its life cycle. Look for a charger, like those from Energizer, that have a timer and charge termination methods.



What you need are either high-powered AA single-use batteries such as the new Panasonic Oxyride Extreme Power batteries (\$4.99 per 4-pack; [www.panasonic.com](http://www.panasonic.com)) or the Energizer e<sup>2</sup> Lithium batteries (\$9.99 per 4-pack; [www.energizer.com](http://www.energizer.com)). Lithium batteries are more expensive, but they'll last longer, and because there's no water in the battery cell, they have a longer life than most primary batteries (that is, non-rechargeables) in cold weather.



Compact Charger • \$19.99 • [www.energizer.com](http://www.energizer.com)

Alternatively, you can also use rechargeable AA NiMH (nickel-metal hydride) batteries. NiMH batteries have, essentially, replaced NiCad (nickel-cadmium) batteries because they are more environmentally friendly. (They don't contain toxic elements such as cadmium.) NiMH batteries also tend to perform better. While you'll initially pay more for NiMH batteries than most non-rechargeable batteries, in the long run this is a more economical—and more ecologically friendly—option. (There are many recycling drop-off points, including places such as Home Depot and Radio Shack. Check the Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation's Website [[www.rbrc.com/index.html](http://www.rbrc.com/index.html)] to find one near you.)


The downside is that the initial cost for four batteries and a charger can run \$20 or more, and as always, it's best if you purchase two sets of batteries, so you'll have a backup. Energizer has a compact charger (which is good for traveling) that comes with four 2500 mAh AA batteries (\$19.99; [www.energizer.com](http://www.energizer.com)). NiMH batteries are heavier than non-rechargeables, so keep that in mind as well.

## Batteries Do Make A Difference

Using a couple of AA-compatible cameras, we spent some time taking pictures as we normally would, splitting flash and non-flash pictures at about 50/50. It was interesting to see the impact of choosing different batteries on how many pictures you can capture on one set. Keep in mind that all cameras have different power consumption, so results will vary depending on the model and the battery.

We managed to pull about 70 shots from the Kodak EasyShare C340 (\$99.95; [www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com)) using regular Duracell AA alkaline batteries before the battery indicator appeared, and in all, we were able to shoot 170 photos before they ran out. However, with the new Panasonic Oxyride Extreme Power batteries (\$4.99 for a four-pack; [www.panasonic.com](http://www.panasonic.com)), we got close to 500 shots without the battery indicator appearing at all.

With Canon's PowerShot A620 (\$399.99; [www.canon.com](http://www.canon.com)), we had an even better experience. The camera came with a set of four AA Panasonic LR6-AA industrial alkalines, which allowed us to take more than 350 pictures. That's not bad, but when we switched to the Energizer 2500 mAh NiMH AA re-chargeables, we were able to capture more than 500 images and stopped only because our forefinger became numb from holding down the shutter button.

While you shouldn't base your digital camera choice solely on battery compatibility, it's something to consider. Think about your shooting habits (how many pictures you shoot in a day and if you like to use the on-board editing tools) and if you're willing to keep up with charging batteries, which takes more discipline and planning than you might imagine. Also, check the CIPA rating for the camera you own or are planning to purchase. 



EasyShare C340 •  
\$179.95 •  
[www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com)

Oxyride Extreme Power • \$4.99 •  
[www.panasonic.com](http://www.panasonic.com)

BY THEANO NIKITAS

# Know How

## One Problem, Three Solutions

BY BRIAN HODGE

In some photos, we want to see every detail as clearly as possible—landscapes, for instance. Other photos, particularly portraits, often come off better if the background is blurry, so the surrounding details don't compete with the subject for attention. Cameras

let us make simple work of this, by manually setting a large aperture or simply using Portrait mode.

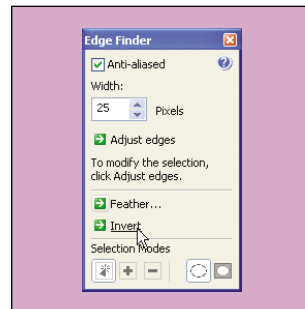
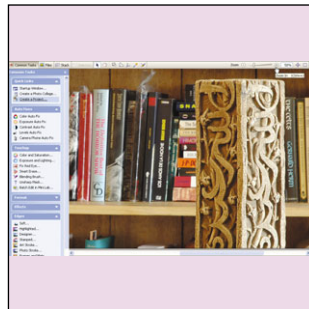
Sometimes, however, we may forget to make a proper aperture setting. Or maybe your subject was so close to the background that you couldn't help but capture both with equal clarity.

Fortunately, with a Gaussian Blur, you can unfocus the background long after you shot the photo.

For our example, we've photographed a pillar-shaped candleholder against a backdrop of books, leaving almost no sense of depth.

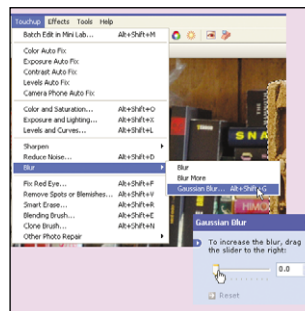
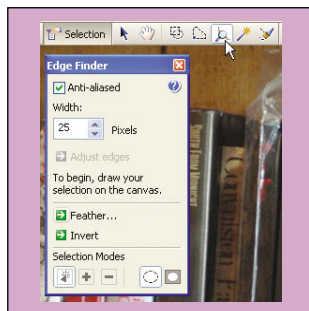
### Microsoft Digital Image Pro 10

Use the Zoom control to set your view size, so your foreground subject takes up as much room as possible, while you can still see the whole thing at once.



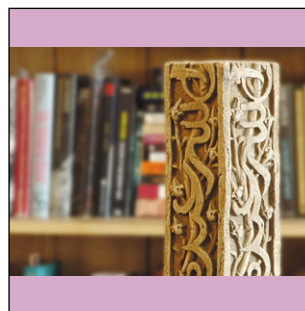
Click Invert in the Edge Finder dialog box. Now everything except your foreground subject is selected.

Choose one of the toolbar's Selection tools, so you can isolate the subject in your photo. The Edge Finder will likely work best for most subjects. Then click Selection to open the Edge Finder dialog box.



From the Touchup Menu, select Blur and then Gaussian Blur. 7. In the Activity Panel, drag the slider to blur the background to your liking.

Click the edge of your subject to establish a starting point and then trace the crosshair around it. Click the edgeline periodically to establish more anchor points, especially when you get into more complex areas. Click the starting point to complete the selection.



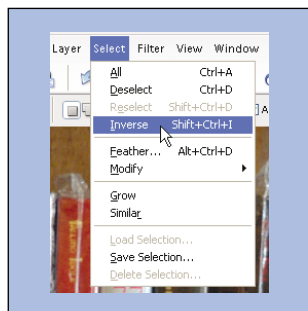
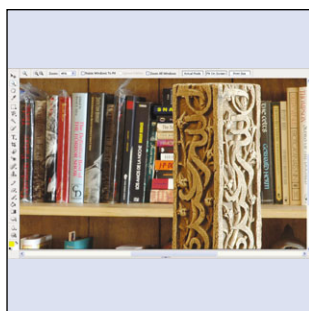
Don't overdo it! Keep the effect subtle enough so it looks like a natural result of a wider aperture setting on your lens.



## Adobe Photoshop Elements 3.0

1

With your photo open in Standard Edit view, use the Zoom tool to adjust the view size as described in the previous Step 1.

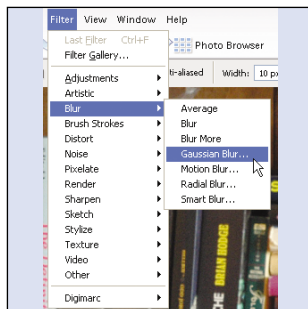
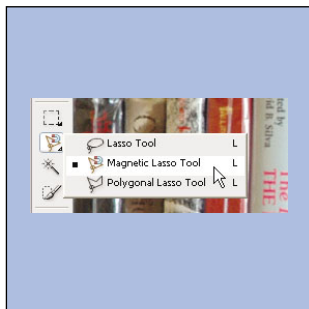


5

Choose Inverse from the Select menu. Now everything except your foreground object is selected.

2

From the toolbar, select one of the Lasso Tools. The Magnetic Lasso looks for edge contrasts to make the selection, and this will be easiest to use for irregularly shaped objects like our candleholder.



6

From the Filter menu, select Blur and then Gaussian Blur.

3

Click to set a starting point on the edge of your subject and trace around it with your mouse. If you're using the Magnetic Lasso, you'll see the selection marquee grab the edges. Single-click when you want to set an anchor point.

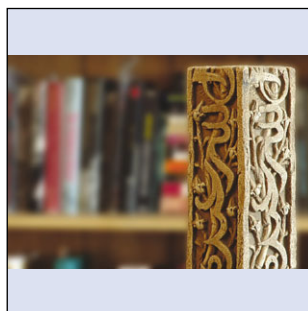
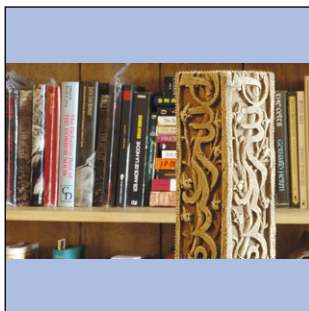


7

Drag the slider to blur the background. You can toggle the Preview on and off to compare before and after results.

4

When you're back where you started, double-click your starting point to complete the selection.

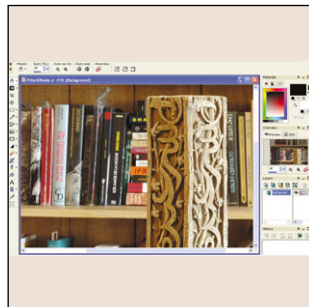


8

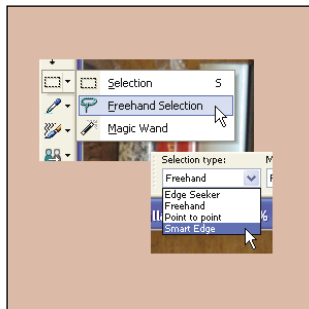
You don't want to overdo it so it looks unnatural. Just blur it to the point that you've obscured the background details enough that your subject stands out more prominently.

## Jasc Paint Shop Pro 9

Use the Zoom control to set your view size as described in Step 1 for Digital Image Pro.



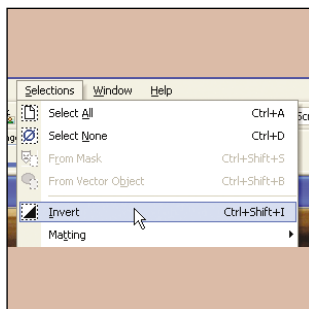
Pick Freehand Selection and open Toolbar Options to set a Selection Type. You'll likely want one of the two edge-finders. Edge Seeker works best when the object's color or lighting is subtly different from the background. Smart Edge works best when there's more contrast between the two.



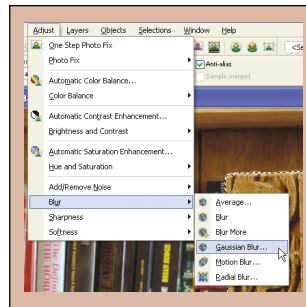
Click around the edges of your subject. When you come back around to where you began, double-click the starting point to complete the selection.



Choose Invert from the Selections menu. Now everything except your foreground object is selected.



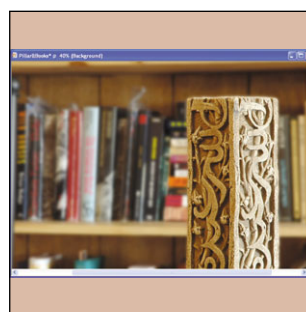
From the Adjust menu, select Blur and then Gaussian Blur.



In the dialog box, set a Radius value to determine the degree of blurring. The preview panels will let you compare before and after views.



Click OK to apply the blur to your photo.





## tips

### How To Really Use Your Scene Modes

# 1

#### When Light Turns Tricky

Use Beach/Snow mode when you're in a situation with a lot of glare: the sun reflecting off snow, sand, water, or even shiny metal, for instance. Ordinarily, the camera's light meter would react to this glare by sensing more light than is actually there, thus underexposing the shot. Beach/Snow mode counteracts that tendency. The trouble is, though, these are often the trickiest conditions to shoot under, so the camera may still be fooled. Examine your shot, and if it still looks dim, try another with your exposure compensation set to +1.

# 2

#### Modes Aren't Magic

Most cameras have at least one mode for low-light settings. For example, yours might have a Night Landscape mode for outdoor shots lit by the moon or city lights and a Candlelight mode for birthday cakes and romantic dinner settings. These can certainly deliver great shots but not if you handle the camera the same as you would during the day. Low-light modes use a long exposure time, longer than mere mortals can hold a camera absolutely motionless. To prevent blurring, use a tripod or stabilize the camera on a level surface.

# 3

#### At Day's End

Another apparent overlap you may encounter is separate modes for Dusk/Dawn and Sunset. After all, when does the sun set, if not at dusk? In this case, although they may have similar names, the modes address two entirely different things. Dusk/Dawn is another low-light setting; choose it when you need to make the most of that dim, diffuse natural light when the sun is coming or going—a purple twilight, for instance. Sunset denotes your actual subject and is for those evenings when you want to capture day's end in all its fiery pink and orange brilliance.

# 4

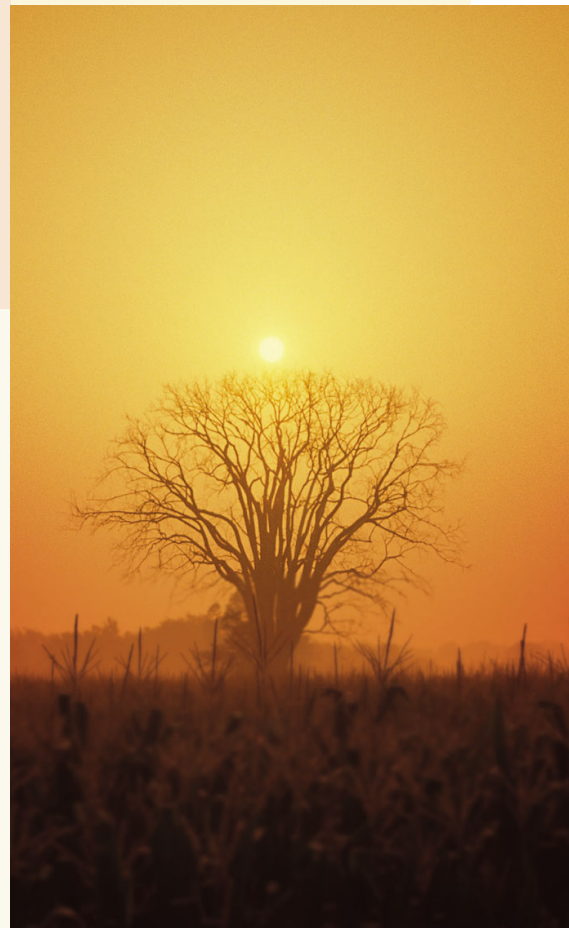
#### To Flash Or Not To Flash

There are comparatively few outdoor museums, so why have separate Museum and Indoor modes? The main difference is the camera's flash. Museums and galleries often prohibit flash photography (the cumulative effect of light bursts can degrade the color of certain exhibits), so use Museum mode when you're inside but don't want your flash to fire. Indoor mode (sometimes called Party/Indoor) is geared toward capturing a room's features and ambience, even if the light is low, so it may use a fill flash to pick up some extra detail.

# 5

#### Know The Meaning Of The Mode

Most digital cameras have lots of scene modes to adapt to different shooting situations. Some modes are entirely self-explanatory. Landscape mode doesn't leave any room for doubt. Others overlap enough that they can be a bit confusing: Portrait and Close-Up, for instance. Isn't a close-up of someone a portrait? Technically, maybe, but not in the camera's eye. Portrait mode is indeed for people; it softly blurs the background, so the emphasis remains on the person. Close-Up, on the other hand, is for when you're getting in close physical proximity to a small subject: a flower, a garden snail, or that rare coin you intend to sell on eBay.



BY BRIAN HODGE

# Gift Of The Month

## Golf Master

**A**pril is here. Spring has finally arrived, and we all know what that means. Birds are chirping; grass is turning green; flowers are blooming; and golf courses around the country are bustling. Although most of us know at least one hard-core golfer who has toughed out the winter chill to spend some time on the course, there are many more who have waited patiently for the first signs of spring to enjoy the green. And it's for those more casual golfers that we have selected April's Gift Of The Month. Each month we track down a gift that we think a specific person on your to-buy-for list will enjoy, and we stick to a \$50 budget to keep it affordable. This month we've selected Excalibur's Golf Master (\$24.95; [www.excaliburelectronics.net](http://www.excaliburelectronics.net)), a pocket caddy with some nifty features and a sense of humor.

### Tee Up

Gone are the days of juggling a score-card and tiny pencil at the golf course. With the Golf Master, which runs on an included 3V lithium battery, you can easily keep score for up to four players, and there's no pencil tip to break. In addition to keeping track of your score, you can program up to 16 players in the Golf Master by entering a three-character nickname into the Add Names menu, and you can easily change the names at any time. Pick your four favorite courses and enter the important information, including a four-character name and the par and handicap for each hole.

For golfing newbies, the Golf Master can help with the basics: the rules of the game, advice about which club to use, etc. Rules Of Golf, Golf Etiquette, and Glossary categories contain necessary information to help you learn more about the game inside and out. If you find yourself at a hole and at a loss for which club would best suit your needs, select Club Selection and the hole's yardage for a list of club suggestions. You can select the particular club for detailed information about its features and when to use it.

And just in case you find yourself on the 12th hole and in need of a good laugh, the Golf Master even includes 13 golf

jokes that are funny mostly because of how bad they are, but worth a chuckle nonetheless. (How can you tell an employee from the boss on a golf course? The employee is the one congratulating the other on a 10. The employee is also the only player who can get a hole-in-one and say "oops.")

Although the Golf Master can't do anything to help you get your ball out of that sand trap or make it any easier to fish it out of the water, we think it'd make a great gift for anyone who wants to make their trip to the golf course a little less complicated. **ce**

BY JOY MARTIN







## TIME-SAVING WEB SITES

**H**op on to these Web sites for time-saving tips and ways to maximize your home time.

### ■ CAMPBELL'S KITCHEN

[www.campbellkitchen.com](http://www.campbellkitchen.com)

Find easy, quick recipes and, in some cases, a video demonstrating meal preparation. Sign up for Meal Mail to receive recipes in your Inbox daily or weekly, plus request e-newsletters from other Campbell's brands, such as Swanson and Pepperidge Farm.

### ■ KRAFT FOODS

[www.kraftfoods.com](http://www.kraftfoods.com)

Recipes at this site focus on healthy eating and living.

### ■ DO IT YOURSELF

[www.doityourself.com/clean](http://www.doityourself.com/clean)

Learn how to safely clean everything from lipstick stains to window blinds.

### ■ SNAPPISH

[www.snapfish.com](http://www.snapfish.com)

Store and share your digital pics for free and order 4 x 6 prints for as low as 12 cents each (10 cents if pre-paid).

### ■ USPS

[www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com)

Purchase stamps, print shipping labels, and order free shipping supplies, such as Priority and Express Mail boxes and envelopes.

# Easy Ways To *Maximize* Your Home Time

Use Your Time Efficiently  
With These Tech Tips & Products



The demands of everyday life often leave us wishing for more time to do everything we need—and want—to do. But no matter how much we wish for it, we'll never get another hour in a day or another day in the week. The best we can do is efficiently use the time we have.

Technology can help. Whether it's a product that tackles a job for us or organizes our day, the marketplace is full of items intended to "create" time for us. They can't help you, though, if you don't know they exist.

Some of our time-saving ideas center on products that run the gamut of affordability. Others focus less on products and more on creativity. Either way, you'll find methods here that can let you maximize your precious time at home.

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

## Keep Track of It All

Maybe your need for maximizing your home time doesn't require new electronic gadgets so much as the need for organization or a new approach. The right consumer electronics can help you accomplish this.

For instance, every mom needs an efficient way to keep track of the family's schedule or chart their daily and weekly chores. SmartDraw's Calendar Edition software (\$98; [www.smartdraw.com](http://www.smartdraw.com)) lets you create and personalize calendars and planners. (A free trial of the

software is available, as well.) At HP's Activity Center ([www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com)), you'll find detailed instructions for creating your own calendar. We like HP's Date-Keeper Photo Calendar because it lets you customize each month with an appropriate favorite photo, such as one from last year's trip to Hilton Head in July. (A fashionable, personalized calendar is always nicer to look at than a black-and-white template.) Best of all, the whole family can get involved in making it. (See the "Don't Forget Quality Time" sidebar for more ideas.)



Connect Io Intelligent Oven • \$8,699 (varies by region) • [www.tmio.com](http://www.tmio.com)

## The Kitchen As Command Central

Every home—especially homes with children—has a room that serves as “command central.” Typically, that room is the kitchen. Busy moms need to integrate as many helpful tools into that room as possible, so they can attend to multiple tasks at once.

But first, assess your needs. When you’re busy cooking, baking, or packing lunches, what other jobs do you need to attend to? For some, keeping an eye or ear on the news and the weather forecast, especially in the morning, is a must. If so, install an under-the-cabinet CD player, such as the Sony’s Kitchen CD Clock Radio (\$84.95; [www.sony.com](http://www.sony.com)). Sony’s line of kitchen radios runs from this very affordable model up to the Under Cabinet LCD-TV DVD/CD Clock Radio (\$499.95). With a device like this in the kitchen, a room where family and friends tend to gather, you’ll never lack for companionship, news, or entertainment as you go about your daily work.

Perhaps you have space for a sleek PC or notebook, such as a model from HP’s Pavilion ze2000z series (\$699 and up; [www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com)), in your kitchen. Being able to go online from the kitchen offers many advantages, such as checking a school’s Web site for its lunch menu or extracurricular activities calendar. Or, you could visit any number of Web sites that offer easy and nutritious recipes that can be made with common ingredients you have

stocked in the pantry. (See our “Time Saving Web Sites” sidebar for more ideas.)

**Appliance envy.** The ultimate kitchen appliance/data bank may be LG Electronic’s updated TV Refrigerator, model LSC-26990TT (\$3,499; [www.lgusa.com](http://www.lgusa.com)). This side-by-side unit, which comes in a fashionable titanium finish, includes a 15-inch, cable-ready LCD TV, as well as an FM radio with remote control and DVD connection on one side. On the other side is a smaller information display from which you can access weather forecasts, a recipe bank preloaded with 100 recipes, a calendar with alarm, and photos that you’ve uploaded via the refrigerator’s USB port near the dispenser area. That’s a sleeker alternative to a fridge covered with magnet-held notes!

When it comes to cooking, nothing will free up home time for you as much as a smart appliance you can control when you’re away. You can start or change the cooking settings on the TMIO Connect Io Intelligent Oven (\$8,699 [price varies by region]; [www.tmio.com](http://www.tmio.com)), a 30-inch stainless steel double wall unit with Ethernet capabilities, via your cell phone or Internet-connected computer. The Connect Io contains a refrigeration unit, which keeps food placed in the oven cool until you start the oven. When you’re at home, just use the controls on the Clear Tek touchscreen, designed by 3M.

## Don’t Forget Quality Time

Using technology to maximize your home time will undoubtedly leave you with more precious free time, as well. Here are some ways you can spend it wisely with your family.

One simple way to do this is to have a family movie night with your home videos. Remember all that footage you’ve shot over the years? Now’s the time to dust it off and enjoy it.

Another fun project everyone can participate in is making a “documentary” of family history by recording interviews with grandparents and great-grandparents with either a voice recorder or a digital camcorder. Let your kids think of questions to ask the interviewee. Include questions that capture what life was like in a certain era: “Who were the popular entertainers and athletes back then?” “What was your first car?” “What did a gallon of gas cost then?”

Don’t forget to film the subject with a few favorite possessions, such as a military medal of honor or a tea set purchased in Japan, and ask them to talk about what makes the item special. The DVD you make from the interviews will be cherished for a lifetime, and you’ll make memories in the process. ●



## Quick Clean

When you're not busy in the kitchen, cleaning probably tops the list of the rest of your home chores. A few CE products can save you time with these tasks, too.

One of the most intriguing products on the market is iRobot's line of Roomba robot vacuums (\$149.99 to \$329.99; [www.irobotstore.com](http://www.irobotstore.com)). We love any Roomba because you can turn it on, forget about it, go off and enjoy time with your family, and return home to floors that are nicely vacuumed. (A "virtual wall" keeps Roomba contained in the area you want cleaned.) Our favorite in the line is the Roomba Scheduler (\$329.99), which you can preset with one of seven cleaning schedules. Battery power gives the Roomba up to two hours of cleaning power, and when it's done, the Roomba will return to its self-charging base.

iRobot sells less-expensive Roomba models, as well, including the Pink Ribbon Edition (\$180). Twenty percent of the sale price from this pretty pink model is donated to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. iRobot also offers the Scooba (\$399.99), which both washes and dries tile, linoleum, or hardwood floors, leaving you with more time to relax or spend with your friends and family.

Who likes to iron? In our experience, not many, and if you're a member of this group, there's the new LG SteamWasher (\$1,499 for the white model; \$1,599 for the blue, hitting the market this spring.). It can not only reduce or eliminate the need to iron, but also spare you trips to the dry cleaner. Without using water or detergent, the SteamFresh cycle steams out wrinkles and odors from clothes and is safe to use on dry clean-only and gentle care garments. You also can use this setting to spiffy up clothing between washings.

The feature we think is most useful, however, is the optional remote monitor (\$99), which lets you keep an eye on your laundry when you're anywhere else in the house. No more traipsing upstairs to see where the laundry cycle is; you can just relax until your monitor signals that a load is done.

Roomba Discovery • \$279.99 • [www.irobot.com](http://www.irobot.com)



## Treat Yourself

**N**o matter what you're doing at home, don't forget the music. Whatever the task at hand, a room filled with your favorite songs will make it more enjoyable. An MP3 player, a portable CD player, or satellite radio receiver is ideal for taking your tunes with you into any room.

For instance, the Sanyo CRSR-10 Plug & Play System for SIRIUS satellite radio (\$149.99; [www.sirius.com](http://www.sirius.com)) can accompany you all over the house, as well as into your car. Same with the Delphi XM MyFi (\$224.99; [www.xmradio.com](http://www.xmradio.com)), which comes with headphones and a remote control. If you'd rather have an MP3 player, choose a flash-based player with an arm band (we love the Creative Zen Nano Plus [\$139 for 1GB; [www.creative.com](http://www.creative.com)]), so you don't have mess with pockets or lanyard when you're busy. For the most part, flash-based players are both smaller and lighter, and they won't skip, so they are great for women who are active in general.

Finally, don't forget the kids. Energize their efforts and keep smiles on their face by burning CDs of their favorite songs, so they can have a soundtrack to work by, too.

The sooner you all finish your chores, the more time you'll have for fun with each other. Using technology to maximize your home time will make everyone happier and more relaxed. ●

# Make Your Devices Blend Right In

## Disguise Or Display Your CE At Home



Kensington Stereo Dock • \$89.99 • [us.kensington.com](http://us.kensington.com)

**D**epending on your taste and budget, there are numerous options that combine your love of CE with your personal sense of style. Whether your home is shabby chic, country, or contemporary, smart shopping and creative planning help integrate your favorite devices into your home. You'll find a range of gorgeous media-friendly furniture—in all price ranges—that can accentuate or minimize your TV, stereo, or home-theater system, as well as all of your CDs, tapes, and DVDs. Here, we offer some room-by-room solutions to your biggest decorating dilemmas.

### The Living Room

For most of us, the living room is the center of our home. It's where we set up our home theaters, play music, and spend our leisure time. It's also the room where we entertain guests—so it has to look great and be comfortable, too. For parents, it's often the room where children play, so it has to be practical—not too many sharp edges or stray cords; and for couples, the living room can also be the battleground between the widescreen-TV-loving spouse and the spouse who thinks TVs should be neither seen nor heard. Whatever your situation, you likely place big demands on this particular bit of living space. But, you don't have to settle for bulky if what you want is sleek, and the audiophile doesn't have to give up her surround sound to satisfy the aesthetics of her art-loving partner.



For a distinct, made-to-order solution to your media-management problems, a quick perusal of the IcOn Furniture Collection ([www.iconfurniturecollection.com](http://www.iconfurniturecollection.com)) presents dozens of creations ranging from traditional to contemporary. This furniture company designs its products with CE devices in mind and bills itself as “the first furniture manufacturer to successfully integrate furniture and electronics.” In fact, IcOn Furniture Collection partners with LG Electronics ([us.lge.com](http://us.lge.com)) and offers more than 60 LG products you can integrate into each purchase. Mix-and-match components until you find just the right look and feel for your home.

For those who favor modern-looking designs with the clean lines and cool feel of metal and glass, the Bell'O ([www.bello.com](http://www.bello.com)) line of modular home entertainment furniture (designed in Italy) provides many pleasing options. The company is devoted to designing furniture that displays A/V equipment ranging from flat-panel TVs to whole audio systems.

At the other end of the spectrum, Target ([www.target.com](http://www.target.com)) features lovely and affordable pieces in various styles. You can buy most products online or in the store, and they range in price from the Sauder Fruitwood Finish Universal TV Stand (\$99.99) to the Emily Entertainment Armoire (\$399.99). Ikea ([www.ikea.com](http://www.ikea.com)) also offers affordable options such as the Borghamn media storage combination (\$249.96) and the Hensvik corner TV storage unit (\$99.99).

If you'd rather not add a large piece of furniture to your living room to accommodate your new LCD or plasma screen TV, but you also don't want to stare at a big, blank screen when the TV is off, VisionArt ([www.solarshadingsys.com](http://www.solarshadingsys.com)) has an inventive alternative. Its intricately-designed frames make the TV look like a



SonicImpact SoundPads • \$19 • [www.si5.com](http://www.si5.com)



piece of art, and you can program it to display paintings or themes on-screen when it's not busy broadcasting a show.

## In The Bedroom

Although Oprah swears she'll never have a TV in her bedroom, most of us find it too tempting to lie in bed and watch late-night TV or DVDs. Because bedrooms are supposed to be bastions of solace and serenity, however, it's especially important that the CE we bring into this room blends in.

Tastefully concealing devices in armoires or cabinets keeps them out of

sight—and out of mind—when not in use and has the added benefit of blocking out the LEDs that glow on many CE devices even when they're not in use. (Who wants little red and green eyes glaring at you in the night?)

Pier 1 Imports ([www.pier1.com](http://www.pier1.com)) manufactures six entertainment centers that are well-suited to bedrooms. Among them are the Lotus (\$450), a set of shelves designed to match an Asian-themed room; the Sausalito (\$600), a large armoire-like piece made of ebony-colored solid pine; and the Enise (\$719), which is part of the Enise bedroom collection. Restoration Hardware ([www.restorationhardware.com](http://www.restorationhardware.com)) makes what it calls “audio bureaus” that do double-duty enclosing TVs or audio equipment, as well as storing linens, clothing, or CDs and DVDs. There are two styles: the Mission (\$2,695) and the Marston

(\$2,595); the Marston comes in two colors and is made in the United States.

If space or budget concerns are an issue, install a wall-mounted TV stand such as the Observatä-r from Ikea (\$24.99; [www.ikea.com](http://www.ikea.com)) or any of the wall-mounts offered by Sanus Systems ([www.sanus.com](http://www.sanus.com)). This is an excellent choice for kids' rooms because it ensures that children can't sit too close to the TV, and if you keep the remote, you can control which programs get airtime in their rooms. Be sure to take into account the size and weight of any TV you decide to mount.

For speakers that blend into a carefully decorated bedroom, SoundPads (\$19;



## Rein 'Em In

Once you've installed the right furniture, there's still one element that can ruin the perfect lines of a sleek new entertainment center, desk set, or shelving unit: unsightly cords and cables. Fortunately, there are ways to manage the mayhem and decrease the damage to your carefully planned décor. If your cords are too long, a decorative cord wrap such as the Cable Turtle (\$5.99 and up; [cableorganizer.com/cable-turtle](http://cableorganizer.com/cable-turtle)) will do the trick. For especially large bunches of cables, the Cord Caddy Organizational System (\$19.99; [cableorganizer.com](http://cableorganizer.com)) or the WireMate (\$19.95; [www.wiremate.com](http://www.wiremate.com)) can rein them in. ●

[www.si5.com](http://www.si5.com)) from SonicImpact are stick-on speakers that you can attach to almost any object—framed photographs, bookcases, thin tables—to turn them into permanent stereo speakers. Stick the SoundPads where you want them—choose wisely because they're permanent—and hook them to your stereo as you would any other speaker.

For a more sophisticated option, Artcoustic ([www.artcousticusa.com](http://www.artcousticusa.com)) literally turns speakers into works of art. The UK-based company has 14 speaker and subwoofer models that hang on the wall and look like framed prints. Each has an interchangeable screen that features artwork, photography, or just a single color. There are thousands of pieces of art to choose from, and each one beautifully masks its true purpose without interfering with the sound quality.

There are also many possibilities for iPod owners who want to subtly blend sound into their environments. The Kensington Stereo Dock for iPod (\$89.99; [us.kensington.com](http://us.kensington.com)) connects to your home stereo, cradles and charges your iPod, and operates via an infrared remote. Loading your music collection into your iPod frees shelf space formerly occupied by CDs, and the clean, white design makes the Stereo Dock practically invisible. The Klipsch iGroove Shelf System (\$279.99; [www.klipsch.com](http://www.klipsch.com)) is an alternative for iPod owners. It weighs just over 4 pounds, takes up about a quarter of the space of an equivalent-sounding stereo system,

and is compatible with other MP3 players, so non-iPodders aren't left out.

## In The Kitchen

For most of us, kitchen counter space is at a premium, so adding CE devices to a plethora of kitchen appliances takes extra thought. But being able to cook along with Rachel Ray or listen to Vivaldi (or Sheryl Crow) while you create a meal or entertain guests is well worth the effort.

Because accidents happen, protecting your devices should be priority No. 1. You'll want to position them out of reach of spills and splatters. Once you've scoped out the available surfaces, you may discover that investing in under-the-cabinet mounted devices is your best bet. The Polaroid FDM-1000A 10" Under-The-Cabinet LCD TV with DVD Player (\$349.99; [www.polaroid.com](http://www.polaroid.com)) swivels 180 degrees and folds flat to maximize visibility and space. It also comes with an FM tuner, so you can listen to your favorite radio programs. We also like the Jensen JCR-280-1 under-cabinet CD player and clock radio (\$99.99; [www.jensen.com](http://www.jensen.com)).

Whether you do one room at a time or give yourself a whole house extreme makeover, you can create the look and feel you want at home, without sacrificing anything in the CE department or spending extravagantly to achieve the interior design you dream of. **ce**

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

## Our Favorites for Media Storage



One of the dilemmas faced by every CE lover is what to do with our ever-expanding collections of CDs, DVDs, and other media. We want them to be easily accessible, but we don't want them to clutter up our living space.

Because it's hard to find a truly elegant storage unit, we are especially fond of Salamander Designs' ([life.furniture.com](http://life.furniture.com)) shelves and cabinets. The stackable Annex (\$79) comes in four wood finishes (black, cherry, maple, and walnut) and holds 50 CDs or 35 DVDs. We also like the Synergy (\$599), which is a gorgeous media cabinet that can hold up to 250 CDs or 135 DVDs. (An optional door in steel or glass is an additional \$139.) ●





# Girls' Night In

## Forget The Clubs

It's a fact of life that, as we grow older, we tend to not see our friends as much as we used to. A career, a spouse, and perhaps a house and kids occupy most of our time, and rightly so. But when you get the opportunity to have a girls' night with your friends, why waste it at a stinky, noisy, and crowded club? Instead, invite your friends to your home and use a few CE devices to make your girls' night in fun, relaxing, and memorable.

### Photo Recipe Cards

What is more decadent than a triple-chocolate cake? Inevitably, your friends will want the recipe. Instead of baking it beforehand, ask if they'd like to make it together during your girls' night in.

As you and your friends are assembling the ingredients, take a few photos with your digital camera. Use a camera with a Party scene mode, such as the Casio Exilim EX-Z750 (\$399.99; [www.casio.com](http://www.casio.com)), to capture all the fun without risking the darkish blur that is often in indoor action shots.

Sometime later, after everyone has left, choose one shot and either print it at home (we love the Canon Pixma iP4200 [\$129; [www.canon.com](http://www.canon.com)]) or have it done at a store kiosk or through your favorite photo service Web site (our current fave is Winkflash [[www.winkflash.com](http://www.winkflash.com)]). Then copy the chocolate cake recipe to the back of the photo, laminate it at an office supply store to protect it from a wayward smear of ganache, and mail a copy to each friend for a special, useful, and delicious reminder of your fun night.

### Pick The Perfect Playlist

Your girls' night isn't complete without music. Tunes will often set the mood of your party, so pick wisely. It's rare that you'll want to listen to each and every song on a CD, so you can rip the ones you want to your computer and make the perfect party playlist.

Choose songs that you know all your guests will like. (See our "Playlist Picks" sidebar for our favorites.) Create the playlist on your computer but don't rely on your factory speakers to play the songs. Use a speaker system such as Creative's I-Trigue T3200 (\$79.99; [www.creative.com](http://www.creative.com)), so your guests can clearly hear the songs as loud as they want to.

As a little party favor for your friends, choose 15 or so favorite songs from the

night and burn them a keepsake CD for each person. Use Roxio's Easy Media Creator 8 (\$99.99; [www.roxio.com](http://www.roxio.com)) to name and organize the tracks and create a personalized CD cover. Then package it in a pretty jewel case.

## Movie Night

If you and your friends are planning your night around a good movie, you want to make sure everyone has the best seat in the house. If you're in the market for a new TV and love to entertain, check out a high-quality plasma TV such as the HP Pavillion PL5000N (\$4,299.99; [www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com)). This model has wide angle of vision, which means that no matter how many friends you invite over, the folks relaxing in your side chairs will have just as good a view as those on your sectional.

A good picture is only half of the movie experience—you'll also need a nice surround-sound system for your movie night. We love the Fluance AV-HTB (\$199; [www.fluance.com](http://www.fluance.com)), which is an excellent value. If you're looking for something a bit more modern, check out the Toshiba SD-V65HT (\$349.99; [www.toshiba.com](http://www.toshiba.com)), a system that includes six small, unobtrusive silver speakers, most of which will fit nicely on a bookshelf. Imagine how great "The Motorcycle Diaries" (and Gael García Bernal!) will look and sound with a gorgeous TV and quality speakers.

## Little Touches


Most of us love the little details that go into party planning, and there's no

## Fun Frills

So often it's the little things about party planning that are the most fun. Here are some ways you can use CE devices for the foof and frills of a get-together.

- Use fun photos from the evening, as well as photo-editing software, to create personalized invitations for your upcoming party.
- Your computer, a printer, and software such as Microsoft Publisher can help you create neat place cards for the dinner table. Use stamps or downloadable clip art for accents such as a fleur-de-lis for a formal dinner or a seashell for margarita-accented fiesta.
- Create a message board for your friends—MSN Groups ([groups.msn.com](http://groups.msn.com)) is an especially good, free site—to keep them up-to-date on the party planning. Use it after the party to share photos and memories of the night and plan the next one together.

better time to plan your next girls' night in than right after this one ends. Start a spreadsheet that keeps track of your ideas, as well as the guest list, RSVP responses, and menu. Or make a digital scrapbook (using photo files and embellishment templates that are readily available online) that your friends can

ooh and aah over the next time. Whatever way you use it, CE devices can narrow that gap that so often divides best friends, and it also lets us record the fun times we do have together. 

BY KATIE SOMMER

## Playlist Picks

As we said above, music often sets the tone of a get-together, so choose wisely. Here are a few ideas, as well as a timeline of when to play them.

**7 p.m. to 9 p.m.**—Fun yet a little melodic. Choose songs such as:  
 "Do You Want To," Franz Ferdinand  
 "Paperback Writer," The Beatles  
 "The Sidewinder Sleeps Tonight," R.E.M.  
 "Transdermal Celebration," Ween

**9 p.m. to 11 p.m.**—The meat of the party. Choose songs such as:  
 "Hey Mama," Black Eyed Peas  
 "My Generation," The Who  
 "Hey Ya," Outkast  
 "It's Not Unusual," Tom Jones

**11 p.m. to 1 a.m.**—Wind down time. Choose songs such as:  
 "Tiny Dancer," Elton John  
 "Marching Bands Of Manhattan," Death Cab For Cutie  
 "Somewhere Only We Know," Keane  
 "The Long Day Is Over," Norah Jones



# tips

## Your Tween & CE

### 1

#### Cell Phones For Tweens

Recently, several cell phone makers installed menus that let you program your tween's phone to answer or call only phone numbers you specify. Firefly (\$99.99; [www.fireflymobile.com](http://www.fireflymobile.com)) offers such a phone, as do Hasbro (ChatNow, \$74.99; [www.hasbro.com/chatnow](http://www.hasbro.com/chatnow)), LG (Migo, \$299 with service; [www.mobiledia.com/phones/lg/migo.html](http://www.mobiledia.com/phones/lg/migo.html)), and Enfora (TicTalk, \$99.99; [www.mytictalk.com](http://www.mytictalk.com)). ChatNow also incorporates walkie-talkie features. Most have prepaid plans, letting you reward or punish your tween by adding or taking away minutes.

### 2

#### What's In A Game?

Video games can be great fun. They can also contain violence, sex, and flat-out bad behavior, completely at odds with the values you're striving to teach. Game consoles now help you decide what to let your tween play. With the Xbox 360 and the upcoming Sony PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Revolution, you may block games with R (Restricted), M (Mature), and T (Teen) ratings. In addition, visit online game sites regularly (GameSpot, GameSpy, and the official Playstation, Xbox, and Nintendo sites) not only to stay aware of what games are available, but also to check games your tween wants for appropriate content before you buy them for him.

### 3

#### Blocking TV Channels

If you access TV through a cable tuner or satellite receiver, you probably have built-in parental controls. Find the Settings or Configuration menu for your system and navigate into the channel-blocking area. Here, you can highlight each offending channel and press a button to block it. Usually you can even prevent the channel from displaying on your system's channel guide. After that, lock the system with a password and keep the password private. You can also assign several sets of favorites, including one for your tween, and set that as her default choice. With the system locked, nobody can change that selection.

### 4

#### Get Hip To The Jive

Of course, no matter how carefully you watch your tween's instant messaging or text messaging conversations, it won't do you much good if you don't know what she's talking about. Slang, acronyms, and other codes are rampant in these media, after all. Enter the Teen Chat Decoder ([www.teenchatdecoder.com](http://www.teenchatdecoder.com)), a free download that consists of a searchable database of terms. It would be nice to have a list of terms, so you could browse, as well as search, but this small program is useful nevertheless. For browsing, you can head to the Web for a number of alphabetical lists of slang and abbreviations, of which [www.netlingo.com](http://www.netlingo.com) is a good place to start.

### 5

#### Controlling PCs

Parental control software for PCs has been with us for years, and the programs' capabilities expand regularly to combat new threats. Solid Oak Software's CYBERSitter (\$39.95; [www.cybersitter.com](http://www.cybersitter.com)) rates highly among these programs, using a constantly updated database of sites and word patterns to block content from Web sites and email and instant messages about hate, violence, drugs, sex, and numerous additional selectable categories. Content Watch's ContentProtect (\$39.95; [www.contentwatch.com/products/contentprotect.php](http://www.contentwatch.com/products/contentprotect.php)) keeps detailed logs of your kids' online activities and lets you access the logs remotely. ContentProtect also gets around the problem of overly aggressive blocking by offering dynamic filtering, blocking sites with unacceptable content only as long as that content is actually accessible.



BY NEIL RANDALL

## First Glimpse Special Product Section

This special product section is produced in partnership with leading consumer electronics manufacturers and allows us to provide readers with the most timely product information possible. Browse through these First Glimpse pages to learn about the latest hot products.

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Toshiba HD-XA1 & 62HM195 TV	74
Kodak EasyShare V570 Dual-Lens Digital Camera	76
DLO iHome	78





# first glimpse

Special Product Section

**Logitech Cordless Mini Optical Mouse**  
**MSRP: \$29.99**  
[www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)



## Say Goodbye To The Touchpad—Improve Your Comfort With A Notebook Mouse

The Logitech® Cordless Mini Optical Mouse is ideal for laptop users who value comfort and simplicity. The mouse is shaped to fit in the cup of your hand and provides a resting place for your thumb and pinky on either side. It features a battery indicator light and has a small plug-and-play wireless receiver that snaps onto the base of the mouse so you can easily take it from place to place. It comes in two colors: aquamarine or silver.

### Key Benefits:

- The Cordless Mini Optical Mouse's curvy shape and fun color options allow people to add a personal touch to their mobile solution.
- The package includes a wireless plug-and-play mini-receiver that snaps to the bottom of the mouse and acts as an on/off switch to minimize the mouse's battery depletion.
- Logitech's Tilt Wheel Plus Zoom lets you effortlessly scroll up, down, left, and right, as well as zoom in and out of documents and images.
- A battery indicator light alerts you when power is low.



# first glimpse

Special Product Section

## Logitech Cordless Desktop S 510 Media Remote

MSRP: \$99.99

[www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)



## Cordless Mouse, Keyboard & PC Remote Make Enjoying Media On Your PC Easy

This stylish, ultra-slim cordless keyboard and mouse combination ships with a remote control for your PC. Complementing the minimalist design of today's computers, it gives you the power to take command of music, photos, and video files on your PC—at your desk or from across the room. It's also compatible with Windows XP Media Center Edition.

### Key Benefits:

- The system's remote includes controls for music, PC navigation, photos, and slideshows, as well as seven user-definable buttons.
- The system's smart power management feature means that all three components have up to six months of battery life, on/off switches, and battery indicator lights.
- One-touch keyboard buttons let you launch your favorite applications and Web sites.
- The ambidextrous 800 dpi optical mouse features Logitech's Tilt Wheel Plus Zoom for scrolling side to side and zooming in and out of images and documents





# first glimpse

Special Product Section

**Toshiba HD-XA1**  
**MSRP: \$799.99**  
[www.tacp.toshiba.com](http://www.tacp.toshiba.com)



## A Defining Moment

Since its introduction, DVDs have revolutionized the home-theater market by delivering high-quality audio and video plus interactive bonus features in a convenient, easy-to-use package. Today, due to the incredible growth of high definition television, a new standard is needed to bring the entertainment of DVD into the HDTV age. That new standard is HD DVD.

The Toshiba HD-XA1 HD DVD player provides access to high-definition video, multi-channel digital audio, and enhanced interactive features all on a disc that looks like conventional DVD. When played back on the HD-XA1, new HD DVD discs with high-definition content will deliver high-definition picture quality that matches or exceeds the broadcast HDTV we see today, allowing you to see your favorite movies like never before. And the HD-XA1 supports multiple digital audio formats, including Dolby® Digital Plus, Dolby® TrueHD (two channel) and DTS®-HD (DTS core only), so you'll be sure to hear everything you are seeing. Both audio and video content can be delivered through a single HDMI™ cable when connected to an HDMI-equipped high-definition television with integrated audio, further simplifying the HD DVD experience.

New Advanced Navigation features, such as Fast Search, enhanced commentaries, online gaming, and even shopping, are available on the HD-XA1. And some HD DVDs called Twin Format will include the standard DVD on one side and the HD

DVD version on the other, allowing you to purchase one disc to play on any DVD or HD DVD player in the house.

With a mechanical door that conceals the disc tray, a remote that illuminates automatically when you pick it up, and heavy aluminum construction, it is immediately apparent that the HD-XA1 is something different. Something special. It is, quite simply, a defining moment in digital home entertainment. For more information on this and other Toshiba models, visit Toshiba at [www.tacp.toshiba.com](http://www.tacp.toshiba.com).

Dolby is a registered trademark of Dolby Laboratories Inc.

DTS is a registered trademark of Digital Theater Systems.

HDMI and High Definition Multimedia Interface are trademarks of HDMI Licensing LLC.

Because HD DVD is a new format, certain disc, digital connection and other compatibility issues are possible. Some standard DVD players may encounter difficulties playing Twin Discs. Customer supplied always-on broadband Internet connection required for on-line features, some of which may require higher bandwidth. Some features subject to delayed availability.

**TOSHIBA**  
Image is Everything.™

# first glimpse

Special Product Section



**Toshiba 62HM195 TV**  
**MSRP: \$3,699.99**  
[www.tacp.toshiba.com](http://www.tacp.toshiba.com)

## Higher High Definition

In the world of HDTV, differences in resolution can mean the difference between a great picture and one that is absolutely spectacular. The Toshiba 62HM195 falls squarely into the second category. This 1080p DLP™ projection television combines a high-resolution 1080p DLP™ chip from Texas Instruments with Toshiba's advanced signal processing and television design to create a TV that is among the best in high definition display.

Most high-definition televisions today, whether flat panel or DLP™, create a 720p HDTV picture. And while 720p models are certainly considered HD, they lack the ability, due to a lower pixel count, to fully display 1080i HDTV signals, the most common HDTV signal available today. Only televisions with 1080p display capability can display all of the detail in a quality 1080i signal.

Advanced Toshiba features, including the Talen™X 1080p Light Engine with DEEP Picture™ and Xtreme BLAC™ and PixelPure AT™ digital video signal processing, are combined to create sharp, colorful, realistic high-definition pictures. The Radiance 150™ Hi-Bright Lamp with Quick Restart™ delivers a bright, high-contrast picture in almost any room environment.

The 62HM195 also includes the convenience features you'll need to really enjoy HDTV. Built-in ATSC/QAM digital tuning allows reception of broadcast and cable HDTV signals without a set-top box (an antenna may be required). A CableCARD™ input gives you the ability to order a card from your cable company

that will replace your cable box for reception of scheduled television programming. While built-in TV Guide™ On Screen will allow you to quickly find your favorite shows.

The Toshiba 62HM195 is a unique combination of performance, design, and convenience that makes it the ideal choice as the centerpiece of your home theater system. For more information on this and other Toshiba models, visit Toshiba at [www.tacp.toshiba.com](http://www.tacp.toshiba.com).

DEEP Picture, PixelPure AT, Quick Restart, Radiance 150, TALEN and Xtreme BLAC are trademarks of Toshiba America Consumer Products, L.L.C. DLP™ is a registered trademark of Texas Instruments.

CableCARD is a trademark of Cable Television Laboratories, Inc.

TV Guide On Screen is a trademark of Gemstar-TV Guide International and/or one of its affiliates.

All television pictures are simulated and are for illustrative purposes only. Measurement of screen sizes for television models contained herein is approximate. © Digital Vision

Certain digital cable services (such as video-on-demand, a cable operator's program guide and data-enhanced television services) will not work with CableCARD and may require a separate set-top box from your cable operator. Check with your cable operator for CableCARD availability in your area.

**TOSHIBA**  
Image is Everything.™



# first glimpse

Special Product Section



## Kodak EasyShare V570 Dual-Lens

### Digital Camera

MSRP: \$399 (with Photo Frame Dock 2)

[www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com)

## The World's First Dual-Lens Digital Still Camera

Using proprietary Kodak Retina Dual-Lens technology, the elegant V570 camera wraps an ultra-wide angle lens (23mm) and an optical zoom lens (39 to 117mm) into a small, sleek package less than 1 inch thin.

The EasyShare V570 camera's ultra wide-angle lens coupled with its optical zoom lens produces a total 5X optical zoom range, providing more options to help you capture the perfect shot—group photos, scenic landscapes, dramatic portraits, and close-ups.

No other digital camera offers you such a wide angle of view or the unique design of this model, whose all-glass, stacked Schneider-Kreuznach C-Variogon prism lenses never extend from the camera body.

### Wide-Angle Panorama Stitching & Advanced Video Performance

In addition to its dual-lens design, the 5MP V570 camera boasts a variety of notable features to enhance the photography experience, including in-camera panorama stitching. Using the ultra-wide view in panorama scene mode, you can take in a 180-degree vista with just three shots—an industry exclusive.

### Amazing Quality Prints With 5MP

5MP means you can make exceptional prints up to 20 x 30 inches. More pixels mean you can crop and enlarge and still

# first glimpse

Special Product Section



have great quality. The V570 also features the Kodak Color Science Chips—a high-speed digital processor chip that produces rich, vibrant, true-to-life colors and accurate flesh tones in almost any lighting condition.

Packing advanced video performance, the EasyShare V570 makes it easier for you to shoot all types of action with an ultra-wide angle to capture more of the scene. In addition, the EasyShare V570 camera records TV-quality video, up to 30fps (frames per second) using advanced MPEG-4 compression. Built-in image stabilization technology reduces on-screen shaking from unintentional hand and camera movement. The camera also offers an optical zoom feature for video including auto focus. And it is simple to select any

frame in a video and then save and print it as a “freeze frame” still picture in just seconds.

# Kodak



# first glimpse

Special Product Section

## iHome

MSRP: \$99.95

[www.ihomedirect.com](http://www.ihomedirect.com)

(800) 925-6224



## The Home System For Your iPod

Wake up to *your* music.

The new iHome iH5 wakes you gradually and lulls you to sleep with your iPod music.

The iH5 Reson8 speakers have incredibly rich, natural stereo sound.

It has a digital AM/FM clock radio. And it does all this while charging your iPod, so it's ready to go when you are.

The iH5 is great in any room in the house. Try one in your kitchen or home office.

### Features:

- Clean, contemporary design complements the look of your iPod
- Wake to your iPod, AM/FM radio, or buzzer
- Removable dock inserts fit all docking iPods\*, and unit charges your iPod while docked

# first glimpse

Special Product Section



- Adjust preset time to any of seven different time zones with one button; clock also adjusts for daylight savings time automatically
- Gentle wake and gradual sleep lulls you to sleep and allows for a less startling wake-up
- Stereo drivers in specially designed Reson8™ speaker chambers deliver astounding clarity, depth, and power

**iHome**™  
the home system for your iPod®

iPod not included.

\*iPod shuffle must use in-line jack.

iPod is a registered trademark owned by Apple Computer Inc. in the U.S. and in other countries. iHome and Reson8 are trademarks of SDI Technologies, Inc.



# music & movies

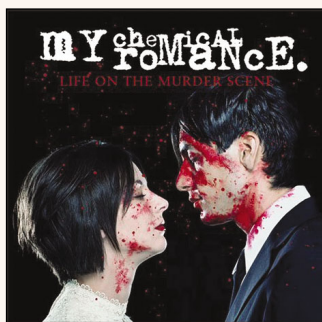
music

BY SAM EVANS

## My Chemical Romance

• AVAILABLE: MARCH 21 • PRICE: \$24.98

LIFE ON THE MURDER SCENE  
[Reprise]

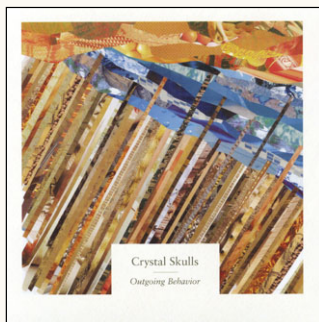


*Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge* proved to be MCR's breakout album as the premiere punk-pop band of today. MCR is back—this time giving its fans a more in-depth look at the band with the release of *Life On The Murder Scene*. This is a three-disc release: two DVDs and one CD. The CD comprises live performances of hits such as “Helena” and “Thank You For The Venom,” plus a few seldom-heard demos from the band. One DVD serves as a video documentary and gives viewers an insider's perspective of My Chemical Romance during its last tour, while the other has live footage of tour stops, MCR's MTV \$2 Bill performance, and AOL Sessions, as well as behind-the-scenes footage for each performance. This is a great album to listen for a perspective on 21st century punk-pop, and a definite must-have for any My Chemical Romance fan.

## Crystal Skulls

• AVAILABLE: APRIL 11 • PRICE: \$13.98

OUTGOING BEHAVIOR  
[Suadee Squeeze Records]



“Move Me Alright” and “The Cosmic Door” are fun ditties with an open and relaxing feeling. The album lulls a little bit in the middle with the band's attempt at a folk rock style, but toward the end of the album, the Skulls gravitate back to the *c'est la vie* sound that makes *Outgoing Behavior* enjoyable.

## The Elected

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$12

SUN, SUN, SUN  
[Sub Pop Records]

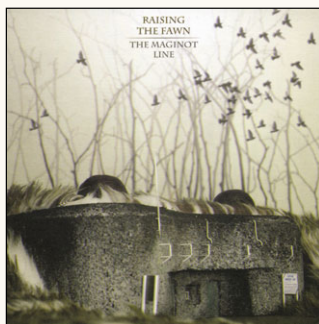


The members of The Elected are back, recently releasing their sophomore offering, *Sun, Sun, Sun*. Fronted by Rilo Kiley guitarist Blake Sennett, The Elected has the same general indie-pop feel as Rilo Kiley; if you like one, you'll most likely enjoy the other. *Sun, Sun, Sun* features understandable lyrics on top of traditional rock/pop rhythm.

## Raising The Fawn

• AVAILABLE: MARCH 7 • PRICE: \$14.99

THE MAGINOT LINE  
[Sonic Unyon Records]



Most interesting about Raising The Fawn is its progressive stance on instrumentation. Listen closely to *The Maginot Line*, and you'll hear a mini-Korg synthesizer, pump organ, accordion, and even a grate. The detuned piano at the end of “Christmastime In The Fields” hasn't sounded so hauntingly intriguing since its implementation by Ives.

## For The Kids: Compilation

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$15.98

BRAZILIAN LOUNGE  
[Putumayo World Music]



If you have aspirations of your child becoming the next Coltrane or Gillespie, then expose him to world music. *Brazilian Lounge* offers lessons in the styles, sounds, and forms that Latin and Brazilian cultures have contributed to music. This compilation includes tracks from Paula Morelenbaum, Bebel Gilberto, and Marcos Valle.

## movies

BY VINCE COGLEY

*\*Oscar winners had not been announced at press time.*

## Rent

RATING: PG-13 • AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$28.96



The Broadway phenomenon that has taken stages around the world by storm finally makes its film debut. "Rent" ostensibly follows a group of residents in New York's East Village, renowned for the Bohemian lifestyles of its residents, but the film unabashedly confronts several contentious social issues of our generation—drug use, nontraditional relationships, and HIV/AIDS. Many of the original cast members from the Broadway production reprise their roles, giving the film consistency "Rentheads" should appreciate. If the musical never piqued your interest, it's doubtful that the cinematic adaptation will change your mind, but "Rent" is at least worth the cost of a rental if you enjoyed the on-stage production. Rosario Dawson ("The Rundown," "Sin City") and Taye Diggs ("How Stella Got Her Groove Back," "Brown Sugar") are familiar faces movie buffs should recognize.

## Pride &amp; Prejudice

RATING: PG • AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$29.98



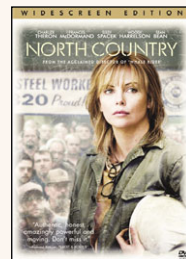
Jane Austen's timeless romance continues to capture hearts nearly two centuries after she originally penned it. Keira Knightley ("Pirates of the Caribbean," "Love Actually") scored an Oscar nod for Best Actress\* for her role as Elizabeth Bennet, whose mother (Academy Award nominee Brenda Blethyn) is desperately seeking wealthy, prominent suitors for her five daughters. When Elizabeth meets the wealthy (and all-too-perfect) Mr. Darcy (played by Matthew Macfadyen), she struggles to remain strong-willed in the face of the undeniable chemistry between the two.

Austen purists may be irked that director Joe Wright and screenwriter

Deborah Moggach don't remain entirely faithful to the original story, but the spirit of Austen's work remains. If you can't get enough "Pride & Prejudice," we heartily recommend the Emmy-nominated 1996 miniseries, starring Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle.

## North Country

RATING: R • AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$28.98



We understood the message Director Niki Caro ("Whale Rider") was trying to send with this "kinda-sorta-loosely-based-on-a-true-story" film, but several key scenes

fail to resonate the way they should. The perennially stunning Charlize Theron ("Cider House Rules," "Monster") earned another Academy Award nomination\* for Best Actress by playing Josey Aimes, a woman who escapes a failed marriage and returns home in dire financial straits.

Aimes eventually takes a job with a local mine and sends shock waves through community when she takes a stand against the pervasive sexual harassment she and her female co-workers tolerate daily. The film is based on *Jenson v. Eveleth Mines*, the first major successful sexual harassment case. Woody Harrelson ("Kingpin," "The People vs. Larry Flynt") and Frances McDormand ("Mississippi Burning," "Fargo") play convincing supporting roles, but the film itself tends to use over-the-top, Hollywood-style drama at the expense of sincerity.

## Jarhead (2-Disc Collector's Edition)

RATING: R • AVAILABLE: MARCH 7 • PRICE: \$39.98



War-film fanatics expecting ferocious battle sequences reminiscent of films such as "Saving Private Ryan" are in for a little shock and awe with this Sam Mendes ("American Beauty")-directed film. Based on the Anthony Swofford novel sharing the same name, "Jarhead" follows Swofford's (played by a Jake Gyllenhaal who's bulked up

considerably since his "Donnie Darko" days) experiences leading up to, during, and after the Gulf War. Peter Sarsgaard ("Skeleton Key," "Flightplan") lends a hand as Troy, a die-hard Marine who serves as a mentor and later befriends Swofford. Jamie Foxx ("Collateral," "Ray") is Staff Sergeant Sykes, a Marine lifer who finds his purpose in combat.

"Jarhead" has its share of intense moments, but if you wait for explosive action as the film's Marine unit does, you'll miss Mendes' effort to document the camaraderie that develops among the jarheads and the film's poignant dénouement that ties everything together.



# games

for you and the people in your life

BY VINCE COGLEY

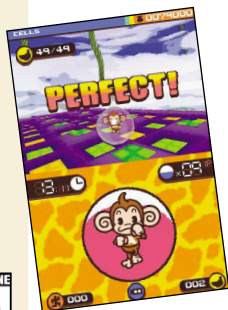
## Super Monkey Ball Touch & Roll

• PRICE: \$29.99

RATING



Nintendo DS



Over 100 new puzzles await gamers who've fallen in love with the Super Monkey Ball series. Super Monkey Ball Touch & Roll marks the series' Nintendo DS debut. One of the game's coolest features is that up to three of your chums can play against you in two party games even if they don't own their own copies. Challenge, Practice, and Replay modes provide hours of single-player entertainment.

• SEGA OF AMERICA • WWW.SEGA.COM

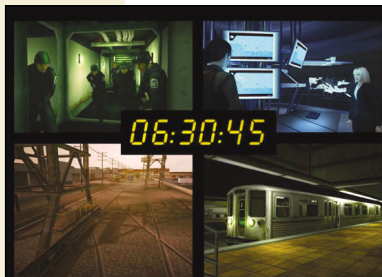
## 24: The Game

• PRICE: \$39.99

RATING



PlayStation 2



Fans of Fox's award-winning action series should have all the Kiefer they can handle because 24: The Game arrives with Season 5 of the TV show already gripping audiences. "24" show writer Duppy Demetrius authored the game's original story, which occurs between the events of season two and three and answers many questions longtime fans have had. 24: The Game has over 100 missions that cover styles of gameplay such as shooting, driving, and puzzle solving.

• 2K GAMES • WWW.2KGAMES.COM

## Fight Night: Round 3

• PRICE: \$59.99 (Xbox 360);  
\$39.99 (PlayStation 2, PlayStation Portable, Xbox)

RATING



Multiplatform



EA Sports' latest boxing title delivers a forceful left hook to other boxing games. One of Fight Night: Round 3's more innovative features is "One Punch Can Change A Fight," which gives players the opportunity to throw a risky haymaker, stopping opponents in their tracks. It also lets you don your virtual gloves and go toe-to-toe with legends of the sweet science, such as Oscar De La Hoya, Joe Frazier, and, of course, Muhammad Ali.

• ELECTRONIC ARTS • WWW.EA.COM

## Loc8tor

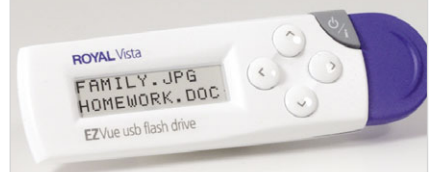
• WWW.LOC8TOR.COM • PRICE: \$99.99



A hundred bucks may not sound unreasonable the next time you can't find something important. That's the logic behind the \$99.99 Loc8tor ([www.loc8tor.com](http://www.loc8tor.com)), which communicates with a small, attachable tag to help you home in on your car keys, your pet, your cell phone, or the Godiva chocolates at the end of the treasure hunt your significant other made for you. Like a divining rod, the Loc8tor can guide you to either of its tags from 500 feet away, about a city block. You can even set it to alert you when your child wanders too far away. To that end, the \$169.99 Loc8tor Plus adds another homing tag, plus one with a panic button your child can press. Loc8tors support up to 24 tags each; extra tags come in pairs for \$44.99 (homing) or \$49.99 (panic). Who wouldn't want to find a gift like this?

## Royal EZVue Vista

• WWW.LEXAR.COM • PRICE: \$49.99 TO \$149.99



Ever wish you could tell what was on a USB flash drive without having to plug it in? Royal's new EZVue Vista ([www.royal.com](http://www.royal.com)) is always upfront with you. It shows you the names of the files stored on it, even when the drive is powered down. You can use its scroll buttons to browse up or down the file list in the two-line display and even scroll right and left to read those long file names. The EZVue Vista lineup ranges from \$49.99 for 128MB to \$149.99 for 1GB. On the other hand, if you just want to know how much free space is left on your flash drive, check out Lexar's new JumpDrive Mercury ([www.lexar.com](http://www.lexar.com); \$99.99 for 1GB, \$169.99 for 2GB).

## Imation Flash Wristband

• WWW.IMATION.COM • PRICE: \$34.99



She's bright; she's a good student; and she's always on her cell, if not MySpace.com or Xanga. And you know she'd love this wristband from Imation ([www.imation.com](http://www.imation.com)). It's a 256MB USB flash drive masquerading as an accessory. Available in understated black or blue, the Flash Wristband offers stealth storage with a quirky design. The rubber bracelet can also snap onto a belt loop, backpack, or purse strap. It's priced for gift-giving at just \$34.99.

... & gifts

on the lighter side of technology

BY MARTY SEMS



# what they're SAYIN

BY KATHRYN DOLAN

Regardless of whether you consider yourself tech-savvy, the gadgets you own speak for themselves. Most of the women we spoke to this month said they weren't very technical, but take a look at the devices they own!

## Gail Hiskey

### BUSINESS OWNER

Gail has owned Gail's Massage Care, her massage therapy business, for five years. She doesn't consider herself or her family all that tech savvy, but she does consider her cell phone indispensable.



Gail's a phone person. She likes talking on the phone, and she uses her cell phone all of the time. Gail says, "My cell phone appeals to me because I can do about six things at once—all while talking on the phone."

Cell phone bills don't bother her; she doesn't mind paying them. Gail and her husband share a cell phone, and her son also has one. They have a family plan and share minutes. Gail says she's reassured because she knows her kids are safe; although she says, "They abuse the privilege talking to friends, of course, and use up all of the minutes."

The Hiskey family has a PC in the family room, and the entire family uses it. The kids play games and burn CDs. Everyone sends email. As for other devices, Gail says, "My daughter Katelin, who's 13, has a portable DVD player, so she can watch movies in the car, and she also has an iPod. My son just turned 18 in January, and he'll be going to college in the fall. We'll probably buy him a laptop, but we haven't started looking."

## Hope Hepfinger

### STUDENT

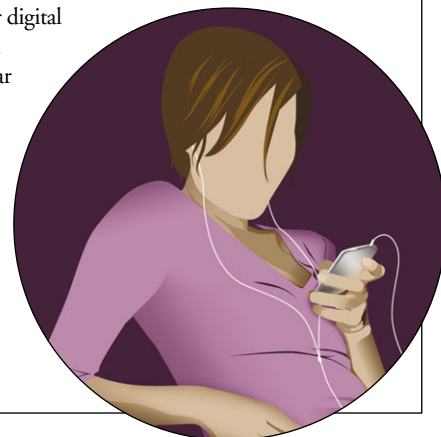
Hope is a senior at Columbia College in Chicago, majoring in film and video production. She's currently working with a woman who graduated last year to secure funding for a short film. Hope adapted a script from a short story, "A Pedestrian Accident" by Robert Coover, after reading it in high school from a book of quirky lit her Dad had recommended.

Hope says because she doesn't live with her family now, she's including her roommate, Christine Tseng (23), in her answer. She says they both have 30GB iPods, and the video iPod is on their wish lists. Hope has a Ghost dock, so she can play her iPod at home through two little JBL Creature Speakers, and she downloads music as needed from iTunes.

Her roommate has an iMac G5, and Hope has a PowerBook G4. She wants a new MacBook Pro; however, with a starting price of \$1,999.99, Hope says she probably won't get one until after May graduation. She loves Macs, and she and her roommate have them for the editing programs: FinalCut Pro, among others.

With her HP scanner, Hope loads slides or film negatives, scans images, or does inverted scanning. She and her roommate each have Sony MiniDV camcorders, but they're for fun. They use 16mm film equipment at school. Hope eventually wants to get a Panavision Genesis or an ARRI-FLEX D-20 (prosumer digital Super35 HD cameras).

Hope has a Cingular cell phone, but she doesn't have a digital camera. She takes stills with her DV camcorder, and using various editing programs, Hope takes the video down to one frame for a still picture.



# G

Who in your family has a CE device of his or her own?

## Maria Canzano

### EMPTY NESTER

Maria's response to our question was, "Oh, we're not a terribly techie family." Reality belies her contention, however. She and husband, John, recently packed youngest son, Tony, off to the U of I (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). Tony left a wireless network he set up, and Maria's and John's PCs are on the network.

Maria's notebook is in the kitchen, so she can check weather, pull up recipes, respond to emails, and organize her life. She teaches Yoga at Waubensee Community

College in Sugar Grove, Ill., which is about 30 minutes southeast of DeKalb. She also visits her mother, who lives in Dixon, Ill., about 60 minutes west of DeKalb. Because radio coverage is spotty, Maria has XM satellite radio in her car. She also has a receiver in her house.

"I got spoiled listening in the car, and I hated to turn off a program or a song when I got home, so

John bought me a receiver for the house, too."

She and John both have cell phones, and Verizon gave them a great deal on camera phones. Maria recently hit a deer on the way to her mom's house, and she used her phone to take pictures of the deer and the damage to her car. She says, "I use my phone or Sony digital camera, whichever device is handy, to snap pictures of my beautiful and photogenic 1-year-old granddaughter, Isabel."

When they remodeled their kitchen last year, Maria had an LCD TV mounted on the wall in the breakfast nook. She and several women from her church have baked cinnamon rolls and bread for the local women's shelter for about 11 years. They take a baking break now, and watch Michael Chiarello's "Easy Entertaining" show.

## Nicole Kaplan

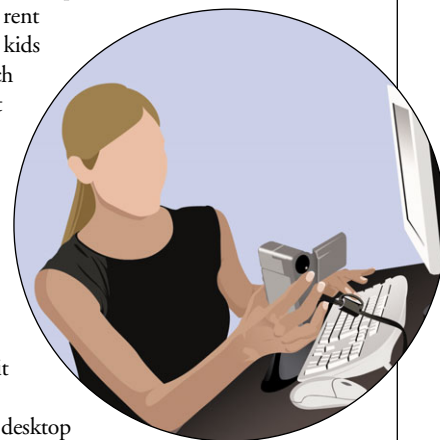
### MOM

Although Nicole says she doesn't consider herself or her husband, Dan, especially technical, they do have quite a few devices. Both she and Dan have cell phones through Cingular—it's a family plan, and they share minutes. Nicole says, "We liked Cingular, but we ultimately went with the service because Dan got a discount through his office. We like it because we always have rollover minutes, too."

Nicole has an older digital camera, a Fujifilm 2.0, and she'd love to upgrade, but for now, it works well for taking and emailing pictures of their three kids (Charli, 3; George, 2; and Addie, 4 months) to family and friends who are out of town. She also uses her Sony Hi8 Handycam to take movies of the kids. They hook the Handycam to the TV to watch footage, and the kids love watching themselves—especially video of when they were babies. Nicole says, "The footage is fun to have because I had forgotten certain details about when Charli [her daughter] was learning to talk, for instance. They kids are so hilarious when we turn on the movies; they can watch themselves for hours!"

Although they limit the time and programs their kids can watch on TV, they do have a DVD player and some Disney movies for kids. Mostly, though, the DVD player is so Nicole and Dan can rent movies to watch after the kids go to bed. With three such small children, they don't often go out these days. Their new Honda Odyssey also has a DVD player, which Nicole says is great for road trips. They don't let the kids watch when they just drive around town; they want to keep it special for road trips.

Nicole also has an HP desktop PC, and Dan has a notebook. Nicole uses the desktop PC for her Tupperware business, but her daughter Charli is the big computer user in the family. Charli navigates herself to PBSkids.org or Playhouse Disney, and she plays memory games and puzzles, colors and paints online, and prints out pictures to color. She knows the alphabet, can type her own name, and knows how to use the keys and mouse to navigate where she wants to go.





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For your chance to win a Sony Walkman Bean™, go to

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# Multitasking At Its Best



## The digital media software that does it all!

**Announcing Nero 7 Ultra Edition** – The Ultimate Audio, Video, Photo, Data and TV Solution which meets all of your digital media needs, now enables you to easily take control of your home entertainment experience.

Whether you want to create audio playlists of your MP3s or entertaining slide-shows of your photos, edit your home videos, burn a backup of your DVDs\*, convert your audio & video into state-of-the-art MPEG-4 (Nero Digital™) files, share your content on your consumer electronic devices or manage your media files with a click of your remote control, Nero 7 Ultra Edition is truly the only partner you need for today's digital home.



[www.nero.com](http://www.nero.com)



CREATE



EDIT



BURN



SHARE



ENJOY

Available at participating  
retailers, including:



\* Does not copy DVD with copy protection



# exit

What better way to usher in April than with some spring cleaning? Here are our favorite CE products that you can use to help keep your home spic and span.

**iKlear Apple Polish Kit**  
www.klearscreen.com  
\$19.95  
Safely clean your iPod, iBook, and PowerBook



**Roomba Discovery SE Scheduler (Special Edition)**  
www.hammacher.com  
\$349.95  
Get the best of all worlds with this special-edition Roomba



**DataVac Shuttle**  
www.metrovacworld.com  
\$29.99  
Keep your keyboard crumb-free



**SpinSweep Pro**  
www.hoover.com  
\$89.99 to \$99.99  
Perfect for an avid gardener

**Screen Cleaner**  
www.fellowes.com  
\$4.99  
Keep your monitor clear as day



**Deluxe Ultrasonic Jewelry Cleaner**  
\$119.95  
www.sharperimage.com  
Clean your bling with 42,000 ultrasonic cleaning waves



**Scooba**  
www.irobot.com  
\$399.99  
Make your hardwood shine with no effort



**SpotBot**  
www.bissell.com  
\$149.99  
With a smart system so you can walk away



**Febreze Scentsories**  
www.febreze.com  
\$35.99  
The smell of your flower garden on a CD



**Toothbrush Sanitizer**  
www.violight.com  
\$49.95  
UV rays kill those germs



**Touchless Trashcan**  
www.touchlesstrashcan.com  
\$179.95  
Use infrared, not your hands, and keep your home sanitary



**Soap Genie Dispenser**  
\$39.95  
www.sharperimage.com  
Automatically dispense soap and lotion





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## INTRODUCING THE *SLIM-LINE* WIRELESS PRESENTATION REMOTE

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The Slim-Line Wireless Presentation even has a built-in laser pointer to accentuate highlights. It requires no software or setup and installs in seconds.

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### Features:

- USB Plug and Play Convenience - No software to load
- Offers a 75 feet omni-directional RF range for wider coverage
- Allows you to advance or repeat slides with Forward, Reverse, Black, White and Escape screen controls
- Compatible with PC & Mac
- Integrated laser pointer
- Stores easily in your computer's PC Card slot



Store the Presenter in your PC Card slot when not in use



USB adapter stows in the back of the Presenter



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